REPRESENTATIVE WOMEN

RACHEL

by

James Agate

GENERAL EDITOR · FRANCIS BIRRELL

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RACHEL

(1821-1858)

VOLUMES ALREADY ANNOUNCED

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning	*Irene Cooper Willis*
Sei Shōnagon	*Arthur Waley*

Rachel

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by

JAMES AGATE

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To

MARIE TEMPEST

Comédienne

Si les faiseurs de chroniques scandaleuses s'avisaient un jour de reproduire ma vie, contez-la dans toute sa simplicité.

RACHEL

RACHEL

(1821-1858)

I

A "REPRESENTATIVE" woman? Yes, I suppose Rachel represents her day and the theatre of her day in the sense that anybody casting an eye upon the French stage of the second quarter of the nineteenth century would be bound to think first of Rachel. But to suggest that the most famous of all tragédiennes is in any way representative of the great dramatic movement which sprang up in her time would be to suggest something essentially false. A great actor or actress may be set in a period and identified with it without belonging to that period. It does not follow that because a mouse and a trap are in the same room the mouse must be inside the trap. Rachel made her first appearance in 1837 and her last in 1855, and though these years saw the rise and growth of the new

Romantic Drama, Rachel's only concern with that movement was to turn her back upon it. An illustration from our own theatre may be useful. Any one asked to name the most famous actor and actress on the English stage during the latter half of the nineteenth century would, I presume, have no hesitation in naming Henry Irving and Ellen Terry. Equally it will not be disputed first, that this great partnership saw the beginning of the greatest revival of dramatic energy in this country since the age of Elizabeth, and second, that the partnership stood aloof from it. He who should write a book round these two great players will have nothing to say of the new intellectual movement begun in 1891 by the Independent Theatre, and whoever writes of the new drama inaugurated by George Bernard Shaw will not mention these players. As with them so with Rachel; and that the French actress appeared in Victor Hugo's *Angelo* has no more significance than that the English actress appeared

in Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion.* Each took a fancy to a rattling good part.

When Rachel first stepped on the stage of the Comédie Française French classical tragedy was not dying but dead, and it was largely Rachel's predecessors who had killed it. In the hands of Raucourt, George, and Duchesnois, the silver chains of Racine had become cumbrous fetters, and in their mouths the stilted had become the bombastic. The classical writers had degenerated. After Racine had come Voltaire, inferior as a poet and an even poorer hand in the creation of character. To Voltaire succeeded Delavigne, with whose death in 1844 classical tragedy in France saw its last kick. Fourteen years before this the Romantic School had launched its attack upon classicism with the famous performance at the Comédie Française of Victor Hugo's *Hernani.* All Paris, including Balzac, Berlioz, and Théophile Gautier, wearing his historic costume, was present at this first victory in force, won on

the evening of February 28th, 1830. Some short time earlier the Romantics had won a preliminary skirmish with a play by Alexandre Dumas, entitled *Henri III et sa Cour*. This historical drama was in prose, and the French public, suspicious only upon the subject of verse, did not grasp the significance of the attack. But about the revolutionary methods of Hugo there was no possibility of mistake. Instead of rôles attached to impossible Latin names there were characters more or less alive and breathing; tirades were replaced by human emotions. Rhodomontade at its most stilted had gone by the board, and was succeeded by a flood of human sentiments still expressed by means of rhetoric, if you like, but by a rhetoric which could include jocularity. In his earlier play of *Cromwell* Hugo had made his hero say:

Vous avez un chapeau de forme singulière.
Excusez ma façon peut-être familière;
Vous plaîrait-il, monsieur, le changer pour
le mien?

This play was never performed owing to the death of the great actor, Talma, for whom it was written. Had it been performed there can be no doubt that the audience would have found this passage inadmissible, since the poet alludes to a hat where the classic drama recognizes nothing less noble than a brow. *Hernani* was a veritable battle. The king asked, *"Quelle heure est-il?"* and was answered *"minuit."* "Whereas," wrote Madame Hugo, "he should have been answered:

"Du haut de ma demeure,
Seigneur, l'horloge enfin sonne la douzième heure."

But *"minuit"* won.

Though Mademoiselle Mars had made a great success in the part of Doña Sol, thus proving the new dramatist to be eminently actable, Rachel would have nothing to say to him. She would have nothing to do with plays like

Lucrèce Borgia and *Ruy Blas,* or with the plays of any of Hugo's colleagues. She left Alexandre Dumas' *Antony* to Madame Dorval, and of this writer appeared in only one play, a revival of *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle,* the chief part in which had been created by Mars. Of Musset and Dumas *fils* Rachel played nothing at all. Side by side with the Romantics were the Naturalists, or comparative Naturalists like Eugène Scribe, who poured upon the French stage hundreds of comedies, vaudevilles and plays about top hats and umbrellas. Every age in which dramatic poets are inflated finds the need for the practitioner in working stagecraft who shall deflate them. Thus on the English stage a Sheridan Knowles and a Bulwer-Lytton will bring about a Robertson, and in France Hugo may very well be deemed accountable for Scribe. With one exception, Rachel found nothing to play in all the multifarious works of this little master. Scribe was as artful a concocter of high-sounding fustian

as Sardou, and in *Adrienne Lecouvreur* found the bait to which the tragédienne, after much tempting, finally consented to rise.

The number of pieces played by Rachel outside the classical repertory is not more than a dozen or so. The list includes one piece by Hugo, one by Dumas *père,* one by Scribe, two tragedies by Ponsard, two ludicrous essays in that genre and a comedy by Madame de Girardin, one tragedy by Pierre Lebrun, and some rubbish by Lemercier and a gentleman calling himself Latour-Saint-Ybars. Finally there was the political excursion entitled *La Marseillaise.* The extent to which Rachel stood apart from the great dramatic movement of her time is sufficiently demonstrated by a single sentence of Mantzius who, in his *History of Theatrical Art,* says: "But an account of this remarkable, this literally unique actress, and of her artistic contemporaries, would lie apart from the aim of this book, *which must follow the course of the romantic drama and show where*

and in whom it found its interpreters." That in this little essay I shall have nothing to say about the Romantic Movement is due to the fact that Rachel is in no way concerned with it.

To what drama then did Rachel turn, since she rejected the new one springing up about her? The period immediately preceding hers had proved entirely barren, even Talma, the great Talma, finding "no new bottles fit for his new, strong wine to ferment in." Thus it came about that Rachel evoked once more the spirit of classic tragedy, and "aroused an enthusiasm, unlooked-for and in that age almost unnatural, for her hero Racine, whom the Romantics had firmly believed to be safely buried." Rachel, then, was not a revolutionary but a reactionary; though this much shall firmly be said for her, that if she brought back classic tragedy she brought it back with a difference, breathing human passion into figures which tradition and a bombastic delivery had combined to render inanimate. She founded no school of acting

and left no successors. She was the last word in classic acting, and illustrates the essential condition of last words, which is that after their utterance no more shall be said.

I feel about Rachel very much as I should feel about a new mistress of the lost art of *bel canto* who should arise and stagger the world with her *réchauffés* of the heroines of Meyerbeer, Donizetti, Bellini and all the brainless crew. It is not implied that Racine was brainless, but rather that his thought is too familiar to bear re-examination. An account of Rachel's purely artistic career could only resolve itself into dissertations upon the characters of Emilie in *Cinna,* Hermione in *Andromaque,* Eriphile in *Iphigénie*, Monime in *Mithridate*, and Aménaïde in *Tancrède,* and her playing of these characters. For those who might be interested in such an account there remains the inexhaustible Jules Janin, who devoted to the subject some hundreds of thousands of words all beautifully printed and bound and reposing

snugly in, among other places, the British Museum. But besides Rachel the actress there is, happily or unhappily, Rachel the woman. Turning her back on the great artistic movement of her time, the chief figure of her time led a life excessively *mouvementé,* and confessing three springs of action—pride of race and family, love of fame and money, love of love. Rachel was first a great Jewess, second a great actress, and third a great lover. Mr. George Moore once wrote of Clairon: "Her lovers seem to have been of all kinds, and as numerous as the sands on the shore. There were captains and colonels, there were authors and *abbés*; like the lady in Congreve's comedy, lovers were to her like curl-papers, she made them as fast as she pleased, and then if she pleased she made more." Let me do Rachel the justice to say that her taste was nicer than that of her great predecessor. She took her lovers in the most cultivated circles, and of her time few men of wit and hardly any artists are

to be found who, to use the phrase which Balzac gives to de Marsay *à propos* of Diane de Maufrigneuse, have not *"passé par là."* The full truth about Rachel has only just been told in France, and to my knowledge has not yet been told in England. If that which follows takes on the complexion of a *vie amoureuse* it is because that side of life constituted by far the largest part of Rachel's existence.

2

ELISA FÉLIX, afterwards known as Rachel, was born in the year in which Napoleon died. By common consent the most awe-inspiring actress of all time, she restored vigour, truth and naturalness to the drama of Racine and Corneille, becalmed in the doldrums of declamation. Rachel hectored the Comédie Française throughout seventeen years, imposed her will upon its directors and the French nation, staggered the English including their Duke of Wellington, was received by Queen Victoria who gave her a bracelet, made whirlwind tours of Belguim, Holland, Prussia, Russia and America, which continent, unwooëd, returned her exhausted and worn-out. She died of consumption at Cannet, near Cannes, at the age of thirty-six. The funeral, which took place at

Père Lachaise, was attended by the entire world of art and letters, the Comédie alone being unrepresented. Rachel left behind her a rapacious papa Félix, a mother equally close-fisted, a brother who was the Talma of money-grubbing impresarios, and three sisters. Rebecca, Rachel's favourite, upon whom the tragédienne lavished all that she had of heart and compunction, pre-deceased her by four years. Rachel was first and foremost a Jewess, whence it follows that loyalty to tribe was ingrained in her. This loyalty had for result the foisting upon the Comédie, whether the Comédie liked it or not, of Brother Raphaël, sister Sarah, who was never an actress at heart and ultimately declined into the perfumery business and the invention of the lotion known as *L'Eau des Fées*, the passably sentimental Rebecca, and Dinah of the acidulated voice and aggressive manner. Thus, with the exception of Lia, who trod the lesser melodramatic scene in the poses of Jenny L'Ouvrière, Jeanne d'Arc and other

popular personages, the Comédie was made to support in succession the entire clan of Félix. Rachel left two sons and no husband, innumerable lovers, a million and a quarter francs, and a reputation as a tragic actress which has never been overshadowed.

For some years after Rachel's death her biographers maintained a conspiracy of silence as to her private life and character, carrying idolatry to the extent of implying refinement in instruction and mastery of the rudiments of schooling. To this end the spelling of her letters was corrected! Whereas even when she was thirty, and after eleven years of the elegances of Racine and Corneille, Rachel could still write to her first protector: "*Je vous aime de tout mon cœur, et me dis* le *plus* dévoué *de vos* amis." Jules Janin gives a malicious example of her speech. Meeting him on the day following her triumph in *Les Horaces* Rachel exclaimed, *"C'est moi que j'étai-t'au Gymnase!"* To which the critic replied: *"Je le savions!"*

Rachel herself had no illusions on this point. *"Un bel autographe de moi?"* she exclaimed. *"Mais certainement, avec ou sans orthographe!"* And to the Comte Molé, who congratulated her on having saved the French language, she returned a witty: "Good for me, since I never learned it!" But Rachel's letters, when first printed, were modified in respects other than spelling; sentiments which her biographers deemed improper were either changed or omitted altogether. Georges d'Heylli, after making admirable profession of candour in the preface to his *Rachel d'Après sa Correspondance*, entirely fails to fulfil that candour. He is to "give the reader the actress not garbed for tragedy but in undress; Rachel as she was, displaying her natural instincts." But the famous collection of letters does nothing of the sort; of which their compiler afterwards made confession. "In the interests of a family which looked sympathetically upon this compilation it was necessary to omit a chapter which would

doubtless have proved the most piquant in the whole volume—a chapter which showed the actress in her most intimate aspect." And d'Heylli did more than leave out: he altered. Writing in 1847 to sister Sarah, Rachel has this sentence: "Until I am pregnant I shall not return to France." This d'Heylli turns into: "I shall not return to France until I am tired of amusing myself." Of the original Anatole France wrote: "This is not the letter of Rachel, but of any woman. Far be it from me to spoil it with marginal nonsense." How much more jealously would the great ironist have refrained from garbling the letter altogether! That bowdlerizings and omissions did essential harm to our knowledge of the actress is proved by the fact that a critic of distinction, writing some nine years later, could say: "Rachel's letters reveal nothing of the sentimental and spiritual sides of her character." How, indeed, should Rachel's letters reveal

anything of the sort, since all those which were calculated to do so were omitted?

You could not see a cloud, because
No cloud was in the sky.

The pudic Madame de B——, warning her English readers not to expect in her *Memoirs of Rachel* any revelation of the foibles of poor human nature, railed off an essential part of her subject as grounds upon which it was not her province to touch, "grounds where the truth, even if known, would afford no better clue to character, would convey no lesson, prevent no fall." Another silly woman writes: "We have tried to extract the poetry and romance there is to be found in this life, rejecting what is base and unworthy." But not all Rachel's biographers have written as though they were Vice-Presidents of a Vigilance Society. Arsène Houssaye declares without mel-

ancholy: "Her private life was solemn only for those who knew nothing whatever about it." Heine, a co-religionist whom Rachel cannot hoodwink, frankly refuses admiration: "Like Mendelssohn, she lacks naïveté." It was said of Sarah Félix that she built no Wall of China round her virtue. Neither did Rachel, who took as many lovers as had beards that pleased her and complexions that liked her. Of her great predecessor, Mlle. Clairon, it has been written: "Her intellect was as passionate as her flesh, and we know how that was attuned to all emotions. The woman was strung with passion, and vibrated all her life like a harp in the wind. Like her physical nature her intellectual nature was passion, yes, truly, she was as passionate in her art as she was in her loves. Life came to her in two great passions —love of art and love of man; she sacrificed all else for these, and occasions never came in her life when she found herself obliged to choose between them."

This is equally true of Rachel, of whose many love affairs, only one, the first, can be traced to interest. No player can sustain a reputation permanently when that reputation is a mere bubble issuing from publicity's mouth. Rachel was a great actress, but the actress of her day who snubbed the vile Véron might never have had the chance to enter the sphere of greatness. Of Véron, that unpleasant stepping-stone, more will be said later. Towards the end of Rachel's life even the foreigner—since the Parisians had long been instructed—could penetrate to the woman whom the tragédienne cloaked so scantily. That "shy, fiery-eyed, little school-marm," Charlotte Brontë, saw through Rachel at once, saw that the star, though shining yet with pale grandeur and steady might, was verging on its judgment-day. "Vashti was not good, I was told; and I have said that she did not look good: though a spirit, she was a spirit out of Tophet." Well, it's an old contradiction. Whether one should

prefer good actresses who are naughty ladies to virtuous women who act indifferently is a question the puritan strain in the English will never be done asking.

Espiègle enfant ce soir, sainte artiste demain,

wrote de Musset, recognizing incompatibility. Rachel's integrity as an artist was as complete as Malibran's; but for her moments of recreation it is possible that *espiègle* is too polite a word. This great career may be used to point whichever of two morals one prefers: either that abnormality in one direction must be balanced by abnormality in another, or that men and women are not made in one piece.

3

Elisa Félix (Rachel) was born on February 28th, 1821, in a wayside hostelry of a Swiss village of the ridiculous name of Mumph. Her father, Jacob Félix—Madame de B—— with Christian inaccuracy calls him Abraham—was a pedlar of Metz. Her mother was Esther Haya, a Bohemian dealer in second-hand clothes. But Jacob had a mind above peddling, and Esther an intelligence which went beyond rags. Speaking a horrible jargon Jacob hawked, in addition to his other commodities, lessons in French and German; he would sell beads to a peasant-girl and offer her choice of lingo in which to tell them when she went to foreign service. To this disingenuous pair children came faster than riches. Continually they kept the road, so that Sarah was born in Ger-

many, Raphaël in Mâcon, Elisa in the absurd Swiss village, Rebecca in Lyons, Dinah in Paris. Where Lia was born I have never been able to find out, and perhaps it doesn't matter. Félix, partly because he had a mind above his profession and partly that his elder children might contribute to their keep, instructed Sarah and Rachel in the mysteries of French verse as soon as they could talk, using *Zaïre* as text-book. When the children had half-a-dozen tirades by heart they were deposited in the cafés, where they sold recitations and oranges. At an early age Sarah, tall, fair, heady in the wine-merchant's sense, showed signs of the "*soupeuse vaillante*," or midnight trencher-woman, she was to become; at ten Rachel, small and dark, was still dreamy and sentimental. But though the children brought home plentiful halfpence their rewards were largely kicks. Early in her 'teens Sarah, wearying of her father's brutalities, took to herself a lover, repented, obtained forgiveness, and captured another. Neverthe-

less it was to Sarah that her parents confided Rachel; she was young and for some time yet her virtue was probable. At the beginning of Rachel's eleventh year the *père* Félix decided to establish himself in Paris, though historians cannot agree as to the exact locality of the hovel chosen by this wandering Jew. Emile Deschanel places it opposite the Morgue; the widow of Samson, Rachel's professor, mentions the Rue du Hasard; Houssaye gives the Rue des Lions-Saint-Paul; Cuisin elects for "one of the less brilliant quarters of the capital"; while Mantel suggests "a room in the Hôtel des Trois-Balances, near the Morgue." The Morgue, I think, has it. But whatever the exact address, it is in Paris that events begin to happen; and indeed it is time, since only twenty-six years are left in which the café-singer is to become the world's greatest tragédienne.

It is possible that the first emissary of the gods was a gentleman of the name of Morin who, writes Madame de B——, "at the pres-

ent day (1858) is employed in a government office." One evening towards the end of 1830 this respectable gentleman was drinking his coffee in a mean café, in a mean street in an undistinguished quarter. There he found Sarah singing and Rachel collecting. Struck with the beauty of Sarah's voice, which "possessed in an extraordinary degree the power of awakening a sympathetic chord in the heart of a listener," the respectable gentleman invited the children to call upon him, promising to give them a letter to Choron, the singing-master. Another account states that it was Choron himself who was drinking coffee in this improbable part of the town. And there is yet a third version to the effect that the *père* Félix placed his daughters with the great teacher in return for services as to which history is silent. The identity of the *entremetteur* is immaterial; the point is Choron and his goodness of heart. Choron's commonsense also, for, quickly perceiving that Rachel's voice was made not for singing but for

declamation, he resigned her tuition to Saint-Aulaire. Saint-Aulaire was a *sociétaire* of the Théâtre Français, and in the old Théâtre Molière of the Rue Saint-Martin had organized a school of dramatic art. The pupils in Saint-Aulaire's school were taught to act by the simple process of acting, and in the presence of a public—that public being composed of the people of the pupils' own quarter.

Rachel made her first public appearance at the age of thirteen and in this theatre. In two years she played thirty-four parts—tragic heroine, confidante, soubrette—Iphigénie and Eriphile (*Iphigénie en Aulide*), Andromaque and Hermione (*Andromaque*), Célimène and Eliante (*Le Misanthrope*). At the age of fifteen Rachel's reputation had spread beyond the quarter and reached the ears of Samson who, descending upon the little theatre for a performance of Corneille's *Don Sanche,* saw the child fly at the rôle of Isabella, Queen of Castille. Struck by the young actress's "tragic dis-

positions" and grand manner, Samson went away babbling of the sacred fire. Some little time afterwards Védel, cashier and future director of the Français, finding that Samson had not overstated the child's qualities, invited her to enter the Conservatoire. Rachel accepted, acceptance being made easier by the award of what might be termed a scholarship of 600 francs a year. At fifteen, then, the child found her feet on the first rung of the ladder. Not in vain had she stuck to her Racine and Corneille, and stolen for Molière. As to this, in the famous *A Supper at Mademoiselle Rachel's*, written three years later, Musset recounts the following conversation:

MUSSET: And so you did the housework?

RACHEL: I got up every morning at six, and by eight o'clock all the beds were made. After that I used to go to market to buy the dinner.

MUSSET: What about your little commission?

RACHEL: You're wrong. I was a very honest housekeeper; wasn't I, Mama?

MADAME FÉLIX: That's true enough.

RACHEL: All except once, and then I stole for a month. When I bought four sous' worth I put down five, and when I paid ten I counted twelve. At the end of the month I had saved up three francs.

MUSSET (*severely*): Mademoiselle Rachel, what did you do with three francs?

MADAME FÉLIX (*seeing that Rachel remains silent*): She bought the works of Molière, Sir.

MUSSET: Do you mean to say that . . .

RACHEL: Yes, of course. I had a Corneille and a Racine, and I simply had to have a Molière. So I spent the three francs first and confessed afterwards.

That night when the other guests had departed and the mother and sisters had gone to bed, Rachel opened her Racine and began to read to the poet the greatest of all French

tragedies. Towards one o'clock the *père* Félix returned from the Opera (*La Juive,* of course) and in the most brutal manner ordered his daughter to "hold her noise." With tears in her eyes Rachel closed the book, exclaiming: "This is revolting! I shall buy a night-light and do my studying in bed."

Rachel's success with Choron and Saint-Aulaire, Samson and Védel, was based upon qualities of mind, and mind only, for at this time of her life she had no other qualities to attract. She was a weakling some four feet six inches high, "about the size of one of Mlle. George's arms," plain of face, hollow of eye, with a total absence of charm and the voice of a costermonger. Yet she had superb diction, and could give naturalness to the most stilted phrases of classic tragedy without loss of poetic beauty. But the Conservatoire had not the happiness to succeed in pleasing Rachel. Cast in *Le Tartufe* for the rôle of Flipote, the maid who as the curtain goes up receives a box on

the ear from her mistress and thereafter disappears from the play, she promptly resigned and sent to her old master, Saint-Aulaire, a request for employment in any theatre in which he had influence. Saint-Aulaire recommended the queer little girl to the actor, Monval, who recommended her to Poirson, the director of the Gymnase. Now Poirson appears to have been one of those eccentric managers who will engage anybody provided he or she looks, and may be presumed to be, thoroughly unsuitable. "What salary do you want?" asked Poirson. "Two thousand francs!" replied the *pére* Félix. "Give me a four-years' engagement," said Poirson, "and I'll make it 3,000 for the first year, with a yearly rise of 1,000 and a forfeit of 80,000 francs if either of us breaks his bond." The pedlar, whose entire capital did not amount to a hundred francs, rubbed his hands, and for the first and last time in his life expressed himself as satisfied. The history of his remaining negotiations with the Comédie for his daugh-

ter's services is one long tale of blackmail. "*Monsié Samson*," he said in his jargon, "*il est pourtant chuste que, puisque mon fille a du talent, qu'elle me rapporte.*"

Duport's *La Vendéenne*, largely borrowed from Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian,* was specially written for Rachel, who made her début in it at the Gymnase on April 4th, 1837. "*Pièce médiocre, début sans éclats*," is the contemporary verdict. *Le Mariage de Raison,* with Rachel in the rôle of Suzette, was put on, and the nightly takings amounted to 54 francs. And so it came about that the bargain between Poirson and the *père* Félix was cancelled by mutual consent, Jacob realizing with Jewish commonsense that to persist in his contract would be to waste his daughter's talents. So Rachel trots off once more, returning this time to Samson, who after giving her further lessons in which she makes enormous progress, recommends her to Védel. The latter hesitates, then engages her for the Théâtre Français at a

salary of 4,000 francs. Jules Janin, who was afterwards to make Rachel's fame in a single article, records a first impression of her which was extremely unflattering: "She wore a frightful hat of pink velvet decorated with a yellow rose, an enormity which would have completely finished most beginners." The Comtesse Dash describes Rachel as thin, plain, swarthy and possessing a disagreeable expression, while a phrenologist of the period describes her as suffering from rickets and with a head several sizes too big for her body. Her forehead was protuberant, and round it at this period she was accustomed to wear a bandeau *à la* Lenglen.

But a fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees; and as with trees so with players. Janin the journalist saw what it is a journalist's business to see; Musset the poet divined what it is a poet's art to divine. Musset found in Rachel's lack of inches something to differentiate her from the customary stage-queen, purple-swathed and muscle-bound. The new-

comer was not physically strong, perhaps, but her manner was simple and modest. Her features were lost upon a large stage, but seen more nearly they affected strangely whoever looked upon them. Samson is even more precise, though it is possible to detect the favouritism of the master for the pupil. "Rachel was below the middle height; she had an overhanging brow, a hollow eye which though not large was expressive, and an accurate nose with the least suspicion of a curve. Her mouth, which was furnished with small teeth of exceeding whiteness and regularity, expressed both pride and mockery. The small head was perfectly set on her shoulders. She was extremely thin, but wore plain clothes with such art that thinness became a quality. Her gait and gesture were supple, and all her person breathed distinction. She had what the vulgar call 'the hands and feet of a duchess.' Her contralto voice was small in range, yet so skilful was her use of it that there was no shade of meaning

which it could not convey; a certain hoarseness which always accompanied her opening speeches disappeared as soon as the piece had got under way. In her earlier years, her figure had not that development which it was afterwards to assume; the smallness of her features and the fact that her eyes were set too close together gave her an undecided expression and she was declared plain. In her later years, however, people said she was beautiful. Neither statement was true; or let me say that both were true according to the day, the hour, and the expression she *willed* her features to assume."

Will! The will to succeed, to brush aside all obstacles, or turn them to commodity—the whole of Rachel lies in her passionate *volonté*. Turn again to Charlotte Brontë's account of Vashti, and note the insistence on that inordinate will, which, "convulsing a perishing mortal frame, bent it to battle with doom and death, fought every inch of ground, sold every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every

faculty, *would* see, *would* hear, *would* breathe, *would* live, up to, within, well nigh *beyond* the moment when death says to all sense and all being—Thus far and no farther!" As in big things so in little; as in things spiritual so in things not of the spirit. Fame Rachel will have, but also riches. Centuries of persistence are in her blood. From childhood one quality in her remains constant—wholehearted, single, tireless persistence. Has she bodily disabilities? She will overcome them, and force her features to nobility. Does she lack charm? She will acquire it. Physically unfitted for Hermione, Athalie, Phèdre, she compels her severest critics to forget that she has a body, and forces them to take her Racine from her eyes. Obstacles exist that she may overcome them. If a director of her theatre be in the way he shall be surmounted. If he is not to be contented with spirit he shall have body. A Véron bars her path? Rachel will turn a Véron to commodity.

4

I SUGGEST that the pill-maker's conquest of Rachel was made possible only by those first disastrous weeks at the Comédie, and that début in the rôle of Camille in *Horace* which was not easily distinguishable from failure. To understand Rachel's next step we must consider what insuccess would have meant to that resolved young woman. We must remember the café-singing, the pedlar's early lessons, the thefts for Molière, the studies under three great masters, the triumphs in the little theatre of the quarter, the applause given to the child by her own people, the misadventure at the Gymnase, the recovery under Samson. Was failure now to say to Rachel—Thus far and no farther? Artistically Rachel knew she had not failed. The audience had been struck by the

clearness of her articulation, the nobility of her gestures, and the simplicity of her by-play. According to Samson she was even a dazzling success, and the applause which greeted her fourth act sounded as if it came not from a handful of spectators but from two thousand. Between the 12th of June and the 30th of August she played thirteen times in *Horace, Cinna, Andromaque, Tancrède, and Iphigénie en Aulide.* But Janin was holiday-making in Italy, and the public, who had not been told of the new genius, remained unmoved; the fashionables were at Trouville, while the unfashionables continued to go about their normal business. Between the 12th of June and the 30th of August, dates which I hold to be critical in the story of Rachel *amoureuse,* the receipts at the Français "accused" the very meagre sum of 650 francs 90 centimes.

Enfin Janin vint—Janin who had the power to make actor, actress, or play, provided always that actor, actress, and play were "there."

His paper was the famous *Journal des Débats*, and one of the foibles of the French has always been to take its dramatic critics seriously. Janin began to look about him for a new lion or lioness to give the season a fillip. He found Rachel; and finding her, discovered better than he knew. That which to the journalist was, in the vulgar speech of today, only a newspaper stunt meant in reality the renaissance of classic tragedy in France. For the French critic had sufficient wit not to pretend to discover a great actress where no great actress was. In his feuilleton of the 10th of September he announced "the most astonishing child which the present theatrical generation has seen." Though pronouncing her plain, small, of poor figure, ordinary in manner and speech, lacking in technique and tradition, he could yet cry from the housetops his discovery of "a blade of gold in a sheath of clay."

M. Louis Barthou, of the Académie Française, whose monograph on Rachel published

in 1926 is altogether admirable, has the following excellent passage on this critical moment in the actress's career: "The child accomplished a revolution without being aware of it. As yet she had not the craftsmanship which can be taught, but she had something better than craftsmanship—she had inspiration and something which cannot be imparted, *le souffle*, passion, and, to put it in a word, genius. Genius came to this Rachel like a sudden flowering, and brought with it an increase of beauty. On the stage she underwent an extraordinary physical transformation. Short, she became tall; plain, she became beautiful; ignorant equally of history, life and art, she stood up to the masterpieces which she restored. One marvels at that inexplicable decree of destiny which made the almost illiterate daughter of a Jew pedlar high priestess in the temples of Corneille, Racine, Voltaire."

A fortnight later, Janin returned to the attack, and from that moment Rachel's name on

the programme guaranteed a house of 6,000 francs. The King, who had neglected the State Theatre for three years, once more occupied his box. With him were his Queen, the King and Queen of the Belgians, the Princesses Adelaide and Clementine, the Duc de Nemours, and the young Princes. At the end of the play, which was *Cinna,* Louis-Philippe overwhelmed Rachel with compliments and flattery. Her sixteen years had come by their reward. Fame and money were hers, and she found herself mistress of her world. And what is even more important, she was now in a position to be her own mistress. Why then should she be any one else's? And why, of all men living, that of the odious Véron? Antedate this question by some three months and one would change its form to: Who else but Véron, leading figure in the theatre and arbiter in the world in which Rachel's fortunes are in such desperate balance?

The Doctor Louis Véron was the son of a

paper merchant in the Rue du Bac. After making a fortune out of pills and a cough mixture, the use of which was never known to prove fatal, the Doctor speculated and speculated successfully. Becoming a personage, he set himself to amuse Society, and the suppers of Véron became as proverbial as the dinners of Lucullus. In return the host asked only that Society should turn a blind eye to his resource and inventiveness in the manner of after-dinner diversions. Society did as it was asked, and either completely ignored its host's orgies, or took part in them. A writer of the period describes Véron as a fat, unhealthy Trimalcion and decadent Amphitryon. Princes and cabinet-ministers graced his board. M. de Montalivet, approving Véron's taste as a gastronomer, made him director of the Opera, which title Véron construed into Sultan of the Ballet. The ballet supped with Véron, or, more accurately, came in after supper; and Véron was recognized as a corrupter of morals "by privilege

and function." "I am a happy man," he said to Arsène Houssaye, "and you must admit that I have a right to call myself so. Every day of my life for thirty years I have drunk champagne, and still I find it good. I have denied myself no woman, and the government does nothing without consulting me." Véron was enormously stout, baldish, and possessed of an insignificant nose lost among ballooning, purple cheeks. The face wore an expression unalterably babyish despite a fringe of thin, yellow beard. Thinner and still yellower tufts decorated the doctorial nape, "like shy plants in a neglected garden." The neck was scrofulous, and it was owing to the carè with which Véron dissimulated these blemishes in multiple neckcloths that wits of the period called him "*Le Prince de Galles*" and addressed his letters: "*Monsieur Véron, dans sa cravate, à Paris.*" His photographs show him to have been indistinguishable from a baboon.

The unknown author of *An Englishman in*

Paris tells us that Véron was as much part and parcel of the history of the French capital during the first half of the nineteenth century as Napoleon I was of the history of France. He likens him to Phineas Barnum, and indeed the comparison is just. The French doctor was the showman *par excellence,* and the inventor of the newspaper-puff or personal paragraph. An artist filling at a moment's notice the part of a fellow-artist, a carpenter saving the operatic situation by his presence of mind—these would have not a paragraph in next morning's papers but a whole column, giving the entire story of their lives, what they liked for dinner, and what (if they were married) their wives liked for dinner. Véron has left us a portrait of himself in six volumes, each as untrue as that picture of which Diderot said: "This is my Sunday father; I want my everyday father." The *Mémoires* show the doctor as "a quasi-philanthropic illusion, while in reality he was a hard-hearted shrewd man of

business, who did good by stealth now and then but never blushed to find it fame." He was not unwitty, and being twitted with his refusal to ride in a railway train retorted that Queen Victoria had a similar objection. On being told that Her Majesty had made the journey from Windsor to London by the Iron Horse, he said gravely: "The Queen of England has a successor; the Véron dynasty begins and ends with Véron, and is going to last as long as Véron can make it." To sum up, we shall probably not be wrong in estimating Véron as the worst kind of *bonhomme*—the *faux bonhomme*, and less likable than either of Balzac's bold, bad Barons, Hulot and Nucingen.

Such was the man to whom Rachel gave herself without affection. Fleischmann, dating the liaison from the last months of 1838 and after the débuts of the tragédienne, finds a reason for it in the fact that Véron, besides being a Director of the Opera and a power in the world of art, letters, and finance, was the founder of

the *Revue de Paris,* the precursor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* Rachel, he tells us "asked no better than to be encouraged, advanced, protected; and Véron consented." Now I suggest that in the last months of 1838 Rachel stood in no need of encouragement, advancement, and protection; that if there had been suing then Véron must have done the suing, to which Rachel would not have consented. Is it not probable that the liaison was formed during Rachel's insuccesses of June, July and August, and that there is question here not of a kink in her character but of her skill in deliberate calculation? In Véron's diary we find the following entry: "On a fine summer evening—June 12th, 1838—in my search after shade and solitude—shade and solitude may be found even in Paris by him who seeketh diligently—I entered the Théâtre Français. It was about eight o'clock, and I constituted the fifth person in the stalls." Madame de B——, our safe biographer for young ladies, prefaces this extract: "We

will give in the doctor's own words the impression made on his very sensitive and enthusiastic organization by her who was predestined to make so deep a one on his heart." But the heart was attacked neither on one side nor the other. The liaison lasted three whole years, and Fleischmann attributes the credit of the rupture to "a gallant gentleman, one of the most sincere admirers of Rachel's talents, whose name is destined to be associated with hers as the name of Maurice de Saxe is associated with that of Adrienne Lecouvreur." In other words, the Count Walewski, the father of Rachel's first-born. According to Fleischmann, Walewski revealed to Rachel the singularities of her lover. As though any woman of wit and penetration, and above all a Jewess, could have remained in ignorance of that which was the talk of Paris!

It is much more likely that the first to champion outraged morality was not Walewski, but Madame Crémieux. Adolphe Crémieux was a

lawyer whose wife had pretensions to a *salon*. Yet they were decent, good-hearted people who, immediately after Rachel's début at the Comédie, took her under kindly wing. Kindly, because no other construction is possible, Rachel always declaring that Crémieux was the only man who had never importuned her. Her letters to the lawyer almost always begin: "*Mon cher papa Crémieux*," and are sometimes signed: "*Votre troisième fille, Rachel.*" Crémieux took pleasure in educating the little genius, and it is recorded that one day in the course of reading aloud from the Book of Genesis she turned to him to ask: "*Qu'est-ce que c'est que le firmament?*" Rachel at this period was hungry for instruction of all kinds, desiring to shine before the world as she shone behind the footlights. She was received everywhere and made her entry into the most exclusive drawing-rooms, haloed by illustrious friendships, and shining in her own light by virtue of her wit,

distinction, and tact. By intuition she succeeded in always saying the right thing, and by virtue of instinct, and instinct alone, she conquered Paris. But always she knew that beneath the instinct there was—nothing. She writes to her brother:

A woman may obtain a position of honour and esteem in conformity with her talents even if she does not possess the varnish which the world calls education. You ask me how this can be and I will tell you. It is because a woman does not lose her charm and, on the contrary, increases it by knowing when to be reserved in manner and language. It is the business of a woman to answer questions rather than to ask them, to listen to discussions instead of starting them. Her natural vanity gives her the desire for instruction, she remembers, and though lacking a proper grounding she ends by acquiring something which at a pinch can be made to pass for education.

A queen of tragedy, Rachel was resolved to extend her sovereignty beyond the theatre. But she went in perpetual fear of the wit of Paris, which takes ignorance as its natural prey and is best pleased when it is demolishing reputations built upon presumption. This is where Crémieux came in. Rachel utilized the little lawyer to the top of her bent, dined with him and his wife when nothing better offered and put them off for good reason or none at all. In subsequent apology she would expend the wealth of all that charm which on the stage she did not possess, and use her apology as the cloak for further requests. Thus we read:

All the world is at my door, so that it is absolutely impossible for me to embrace you today. I am very unhappy about it. At the same time I must ask you to do something for me. Déjazet has just written me a charming letter which I enclose. Please concoct an answer for me, and make it charming as I am

refusing the invitation. Tell her that I am desolated, but that all is not lost, as upon some future occasion I hope to accept. But let it be a letter *above the ordinary*, as she is certain to show it to all her friends.

Besides teaching Rachel how to write letters to important personages, Crémieux undertook the delicate job of instructing the tragédienne in the plots and meaning of the pieces in which she was making her nightly triumphs. It appears that at a dinner party the young actress who, on the stage, listened so intently to the recital of the death of Curiace, was altogether floored by her neighbour's reference to the famous "*Qu'il mourût!*" Floored, but she did not show it, showing rather that tact in maintaining silence which she described to her brother. Later on in the evening she said to Crémieux, "*Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce fameux: 'Qu'il mourût!'*" and then confessed that she knew nothing of any piece except her own part

and her cues. Mlle. Valentine Thomson places the date of this story at the beginning of Rachel's career, and suggests that she came by greater artistic sense later on. It was Crémieux who revealed to Rachel "always with the euphemisms judged indispensable to imagined purity" the exact nature of Phèdre's passion. Imagine the little lawyer's astonishment when the pupil, taking the book out of her master's hand and beginning to recite the rôle, put into it ten times more meaning than he had found it possible to explain. But the time came when the lawyer's eyes were opened, and Rachel could no longer conceal her relations with Véron. And I suggest that it is by Mme. Crémieux in a letter and not by Count Walewski that the first protests are made. Rachel denies, the good woman insists. Still Rachel cries scandal, but that cock won't fight any longer since all Paris is offended by Rachel's carryings-on and, when she appears at the Comédie, exhibits a marked coldness. My evi-

dence is the letter which in October, 1841, Mme. Crémieux sat down at Enghien to write:

My dear Child—

I am broken-hearted. This evening my husband arrived home from Paris, where he spent the afternoon paying calls. In the course of these the conviction was forced upon him, alas! that the reports of which we have already spoken to you are too consistent to be denied. Rachel, my child, you can no longer hesitate. Either you must break off your liaison publicly, which is the only way of stopping the talk, or you will fall! But I cannot believe that one who has risen so high will allow herself to fall, and fall so low: will be content in a day to lose her good name and renown. Between noon and four o'clock my husband interviewed people of the highest distinction, including journalists beyond reproach. Everybody, they told him, is talking. Nobody refuses your performance of Thursday last the admiration it de-

serves: the coolness of the public is due to one thing and one thing only—M. V.'s widely-advertised triumph. It is useless for you to look for any other motive for the public displeasure, since there can be no other motive. Many great ladies, their arms full of flowers, had returned specially to Paris to be present at your reappearance. But since in the theatre there was only one topic of conversation—your behaviour, which was criticized in detail—the flowers were not thrown, since to have thrown them would have been interpreted as a mark of esteem. You must break with V——, my child, and let everybody know. . . . If M. V——is a man of honour, if it is not his aim to discredit you and bring you more easily to submission, he will see your side of the matter. Can it be true that you are nervous about your letters? But if you deem this man capable of turning to improper account anything you may have written to him, is that not all the greater reason why you should close your door? Your letters

will be easily excused, and indeed are excused; what will not and cannot be forgiven is the continuance of this sad, deplorable affair. Rachel, my dear child, if my prayers have any influence upon you, answer this letter, and tell me that you will do what I beg. If you do not answer I shall understand, and though it break my heart I, on my side, will henceforward keep silence. But I cannot believe that you will like being cold-shouldered in Paris and London; that you, the innocent creature taken to the hearts of queens in their palaces and great ladies in their drawing-rooms, will be content to become the actress whom no one will recognize except on the stage. Rachel, my child, you are on the edge of the abyss. Draw back! Today there is time; tomorrow it will be too late.

The letter is sent by hand, and the messenger is told that there is no answer. The Crémieux go specially to Paris, and send an ambassador

to Rachel. Again there is no answer. Relations are finally broken off.

The truth of the matter is that these good people did not understand their Rachel. They tell her she will be wept over, and Rachel does not care a straw. Walewski, painting Véron in his proper colours, tells her she will be laughed at, and Rachel takes fright. She breaks with Véron, whereupon that blackguard does that which at once puts him beyond the pale of polite consideration. He prepares a banquet and serves up Rachel's love-letters for dessert! A kind friend writes the whole story to Rachel, who sits down and unburdens herself to Samson.

"I must leave the stage," she scrawls in her temper, "a scoundrel has insulted me. I abandon my career, and though I have not the courage to kill myself, in my soul there is despair. There is no God, and I believe in nothing. The world gave me life—it is the world

which is killing me. Soon perhaps God will know my heart. I have been mad, but I have never belonged to any man."

But it would seem that this grand despair leaves room for smaller ones, and that though the knife is in Rachel's heart she is still sensible to pin-pricks. Somebody attacks her in a miserable little paper called *Le Corsaire*, and Rachel writes to Jules Janin to tell him that she is not going to stand that sort of thing. She is strong, she writes, too strong even to suffer attack in silence. "*J'aime mieux être femme*"; and she looks forward to revenging herself upon Véron. But, alas! that vengeance takes a Tennysonian turn, and these two preposterous personages anticipate by some six years the poet's "blessings on the falling-out that all the more endears." The scene of the reconciliation is a workman's garret in a low quarter of the town, and "*l'entretien fut même interrompu par le maître du galetas qui vint chercher son pain à*

l'heure du déjeuner." Is there not a lack of dignity about the resumption in secret of a liaison publicly exploded? And the lovers take care to conceal the resumption of the affair from papa Félix who, as Rachel's *entrepreneur*, would have made himself exceedingly unpleasant about it.

Now, what is the truth about Rachel's feeling for this disagreeable gentleman? Did she not accept Véron, asks Fleischmann, as an integral part of her theatrical career, the stepping-stone to fortune, the spring-board of her young renown? I agree, and even to the extent of antedating the liaison by three months. Fleischmann takes care to point out the impossibility of the girl of sixteen even imagining herself in love with the owner of the neck-cloths, and asks whether interest must not have been the mainspring. Yet that strange reconciliation takes place at the very moment when Rachel is the mistress of an illustrious poet, Alfred de Musset, of a celebrated worldling, the Count

Walewski, and is demanded in marriage by the Marquis Alphonse de Custine, grandson of the Revolutionary general guillotined during the Terror, and son of Châteaubriand's *petite amie*. And to these Rachel prefers the ex-vender of patent pills! Can it be that she has a sneaking regard for this almost mythologically unpleasant person? Rachel receives a slap in the face which resounds throughout Paris, spits like a cat, and falls purring into her tormentor's arms. I am tempted to believe that Fleischmann, her most candid biographer, is very near the truth when he writes: "The duality of Rachel's character comes into the open here. As a woman subject to passion, nerves, temper, she has nothing but scorn for Véron. As a Jewess, cautious, calculating, always with an eye to the future, she uses him. On one side are her honour and dignity, on the other her career and her fortune. Does she hesitate? To believe that she can choose one side to the exclusion of the other, is to forget that she is the daughter of

papa Félix." Yet we must do both Rachel and Véron this grace—the grace of believing that each could find in the other something which served as a basis for respect. Eight years after the reconciliation the actress writes to her old lover giving him the itinerary of her forthcoming provincial tour. She does not travel a company and must rely upon actors found at each stopping-place. At Pau she finds a bizarre Achille, at Carcassonne a singular Oreste, at Saint Malo a grotesque Hippolyte. "I must leave you now, I have a rehearsal. Nothing but worry—*they* are awful!" But Véron has no need of instruction in the horrors of provincial tours; for him the list of towns is sufficient. And at the end she writes: "*Quelle route! Quelle fatigue! ! Mais quelle dot! ! !*" What a journey! What weariness! ! But also, what a hatful! ! ! May not the word "*dot*" be the key to the whole affair? The letter ends: "*Adieu, cher ami, ne m'oubliez pas dans ces trois mois; je vous aime de tout mon cœur et*

me dis le plus dévoué de vos amis." We must not forget our lovers' origins—that Véron began life as a maker of pills and a speculator on the Bourse, that Rachel first knew existence as a pilgrimage at the tail of a pedlar's cart. The lives of both were, in the last resort, based upon the passion for money, though Rachel ennobled that passion with her art and Véron degraded it with his pleasures.

But perhaps we are giving ourselves too much trouble, and there is not really any riddle to solve. Why should we look further than the common origin, the common love of power, and that capacity for success called by the Romans *ingenium*, a capacity which both possessed to such an extraordinary degree? But if there still remains a riddle, and we must look still further for the answer, may we not find it in a certain vulgarity of spirit common to both lovers? Here I must lose the company of those who believe that since *Tristan and Isolde* is a great opera its author must have

been a good man; and, conversely, that if Wagner had been less goatish in his amours he would have found a better tune for Isolda's *Liebestod*. On the stage Rachel recreated nobility; off the stage she was very ordinary clay. If she had in a high degree the good qualities of her race—ready wit, courage, persistence, loyalty to family—she possessed in abundance the bad qualities of ostentation, inordinate love of admiration, avarice, greed. In the matter of jewellery she would wear on the same arm ornaments of the finest taste and the tawdriest rubbish. She had two bracelets entirely composed of rings given her by her lovers, so heavy that she could wear only one at a time, the other being carried in her pocket. She had a mania for cadging, for despoiling her friends of gewgaws both valuable and worthless. There is the well-authenticated story of the dinner at Comte Duchâtel's and the silver centre-piece. Rachel admired this and talked so much of her admiration that her host found

himself constrained to offer the piece. She accepted. At the end of the evening the Count offered the tragédienne his carriage. "Perfect!" said Rachel. And reflecting that the evening's enthusiasm might cool before the morning, and that the Countess might have instincts less generous than her husband, she added: "And since there can be no fear of my being robbed I will take your present with me." "Charmed, mademoiselle," retorted the Count, "you won't forget to send me back my carriage?" Rachel delighted to despoil her friends of knick-knacks, to attach a sentimental story to them, and sell them at absurd prices. She begged a guitar and, pretending that it was the one with which she had earned her living on the Place Royale, sold it to Achille Fould, the financier, for one thousand louis!

There is an amusing story in connection with a charity concert in aid of the Christians in China, to whom Sontag, Alboni, Mario, Lablache, Vieuxtemps and others had promised

pious succour. Now if Rachel had expressed her contempt for a poor sort of Christian and the worst kind of Mongol one would at least have respected her commonsense. But she preferred to plead that she was under contract not to perform outside the Français. The organizer of the concert deplored this because, said he, the mere mention of Rachel's name on the programme would make a difference of several thousand francs. "Very well," said Rachel, "you can put my name on the programme. I shall be taken ill just before the concert, and you can make an apology." And as the organizer was taking grateful leave Rachel said: "What about twenty tickets?" Ten were left on the mantelpiece. Then Rachel got busy. The same afternoon she sold the ten tickets to Walewski for a thousand francs, begged back five for her mother and four sisters, sold these five to the Comte le Hon and begged back one. What she did with that one is unknown; probably she gave it to her porter and withheld his

monthly tip. Despite her parsimony Rachel was always in financial difficulties. What she did with the enormous sums she earned nobody has ever been able to discover. She spent nothing in charity, little on her stage costumes, and little on her ordinary clothes and furniture which, sold by public auction after her death, proved to be, with the exception of some presentation lace, porcelain, ornaments, and jewellery, "commonplace to a degree." Rachel left a total fortune of fr. 1,274,371.09, made up as follows:

Sale of effects	fr.	336,476.90
Investments	fr.	717,894.19
The hôtel, Rue Trudon ..	fr.	220,000.00
	fr.	1,274,371.09

Allotting two-thirds of the value of her effects to presentations of one kind and another, we can regard a million francs as the total of

Rachel's economies during twenty years. Some of Rachel's biographers have professed to find that amount small. Probably they have magnified the generosity of her lovers. I confess that to me her savings seem considerable in view of the surprisingly small number of Rachel's appearances in the capital, and the parsimony of the average Frenchman. In the course of seventeen years Rachel's performances at the Comédie totalled no more than 1,156, an average of sixty-eight a year, or roughly one performance a week. The total sum of money received by the Comédie for her performances was 4,394,231 francs 10 centimes. In the European tours I put the number of Rachel's appearances at probably not more than a few hundred. The contract with brother Raphaël for the ill-fated American journey provided for two hundred performances spread over fifteen months. Rachel was to have all her expenses paid, a salary of 1,200,000 francs, and a half share of the gross takings over

4,612,400 francs. The tour lasted less than four months and the total receipts were 675,670 francs. But Rachel by her contract was due to receive 300,000 francs after the first twenty performances, and for each of the other twenty performances 6,000 francs to be paid before the curtain went up. Total—420,000 francs plus expenses to date. And all this, together with hire of theatres, salaries, and expenses of the other actors, was to come out of the total receipts of 675,670 francs. It would be interesting to know how brother Raphaël, the astute manager, and sister Rachel, the rapacious actress, squared accounts.

Nothing has been said about Rachel's provincial tours, which were numerous and protracted and probably brought her in a great deal more money than she ever received from the Comédie. But the life of the world's leading actress cannot be a life without enormous expenses, and it still seems to me to be remarkable that Rachel's savings equalled one-fourth

of the whole amount paid to see her by the public of the French capital. (Another actress on the rampage for fifty years, and giving at a moderate estimate five times the number of Rachel's performances, left precisely nothing, the bailiffs waiting to seize the bed on which she died.)

Rachel's savings were the result of sordid, unremitting avarice pushed to extremities in which there is even a smack of vaudeville. Hear her own account of the steps she took to minimize for brother Raphaël the expenses of the tour in Poland. It is to her sympathetic mother that she writes:

I have just run through the bill of fare to decide what we are to have for dinner, and the prices nearly knocked me down. A wretched cutlet with bread-crumbs costs four francs, soup three francs, bread a franc, and wine is not to be thought of, since an indifferent bottle costs fourteen francs and anything drinkable with a

label more or less false costs thirty francs. It is certain that if all six of us have to dine to-night, Raphaël won't have enough money to get us to Petersburg. So this is what I am going to do. I shall pretend to be extremely ill. This will throw the others into such a state of anxiety that they won't think about eating, to be quite sure of which I shall insist upon their remaining in my bedroom and at my bedside. When midnight strikes, and provided the cook and the hotel staff have gone to bed, I shall allow the company to do the same. And to-morrow before dawn we shall have fled this country to which I have come only to leave my money.

Charming comedy which only Moliére could have invented! It was not without reason that Judith Bernat said, "*Je suis juive, moi, mais Rachel est un juif.*" Side by side with Rachel's unyielding avarice was all that extravagance which is the sacrifice made by the race to vanity

and ostentation. Thus in an early year when Rachel's income from the Comédie is still less than 100,000 francs, of which one-third goes to the clan Félix, we find her installing herself in the hôtel in the Rue Trudon and spending 300,000 francs in beautifying it! A little later she pays 56,000 francs for a country cottage which she calls *"Ma Santé"* and spends a further 20,000 in decorating it.

The hôtel in the Rue Trudon was the gift of Véron's immediate successor, Florian-Alexandre-Joseph, Comte Colonna-Walewski, natural son of Napoleon, a childless widower and as such a lover for whose conquest the gallant ladies of the town raged furiously together. Rachel's bedroom in the Rue Trudon was a *boudoir de parade*. The triumphal bed was enormous, of carved and gilded wood, standing upon a base of velvet pile, upholstered in cherry-coloured silk, and flanked by a rosewood cabinet ornamented with an oval medallion in Sèvres representing a pastoral subject, "*lequel*

meuble renfermait un vase de nuit en porcelaine de Saxe avec sujets." Opposite the bed was a portrait in tapestry of Adrienne Lecouvreur, and in a corner a piano in carved oak. The rest of the room was a tasteless, rococo medley. But Rachel, unaccustomed as yet to existence on this scale, used the room but rarely, and did not sleep in the bed. There was a barely furnished, inner closet which contained what we should call a "shake-down." "*Là se réfugiait la tragédienne.*" Yet in the midst of all the luxury of the Rue Trudon we hear constantly of want of ready money; and it is to mama Félix that her daughter, having exhausted lovers, friends, acquaintances, has recourse. But mama Félix has not been the wife of Jacob in vain. She is familiar with the word "security," and will not advance money to a daughter's genius without custody of that daughter's jewellery. And when principal and interest are not forthcoming at the stipulated time, Esther Félix, *née* Haya, enters into possession.

5

OFF the stage Rachel had an all-compelling charm and the power of fascinating even those it had delighted her to offend. She was the *cabotine* through and through, preferring to quarrel with those to whom she owed the greatest obligations. She made use of Monsieur and Madame Crémieux as long as it suited her, and closed her door to them when that, too, suited her. She loved to quarrel with Samson, her tutor and lifelong friend. Matters came to such a pitch between them that it was feared that Samson would refuse the rôle of the Prince de Bouillon in the production of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. But Samson was a man of conscience who knew his duty to the theatre, and he accepted the part. Whereupon Rachel, who hitherto had never appeared in any rôle with-

out having rehearsed it with Samson, promptly betook herself to one Berryer for instruction in the fable of *The Two Pigeons,* and let all Paris know that she had so betaken herself. But on this occasion Paris declared itself on the side of Samson, also promptly, and Rachel began to fear a cold reception on her first night. The method of her reconciliation with Samson shows the woman. Choosing at rehearsal the moment when Adrienne turns to Michonnet, the old servitor, saying: "This is my true friend to whom I owe everything," Rachel turned not to Regnier, who was playing Michonnet, but to Samson, held out her hand and, on Samson accepting it, threw herself into his arms. And next morning Paris awoke to the touching news.

If Rachel and Véron were the minx and the roué such as I have described—and to their portraits I have brought no bias—what impediment now remains to the marriage of these two affinities? In the Doctor's *Mémoires d'un Bourgeois de Paris*, there is a whole chapter

devoted to Rachel, half of it the purest hypocrisy and half of it admirable criticism. Véron declares his intention of presenting a study—always with the most cautious reserve and the greatest delicacy of language—of the singular and fascinating woman whom "long and friendly relations" have enabled him to observe as an individual at the same time that he has followed her destinies as an artist. "If I had written these Mémoires in 1838," he says, "I should have had difficulty in restraining even before the public my wild admiration for Rachel as she then was; but I have become old, and Rachel has become rich, and nothing modifies heart and mind like money and the passing years." To the famous letter containing the itinerary and ending "*Mais quelle dot!*" is appended the following note: "The terms of friendship in which this letter is couched are perfectly explained by the good relations which are customary between talented artists and influential newspaper proprietors—I was at the

time one of the owners of the *Constitutionnel*." Surely the doctor protests too much! And again:

I have often had the honour of having at my table mademoiselle Rachel together with the most distinguished men of the time; I have seen her surrounded by M. le comte Molé, M. le général Changarnier, M. Achille Fould, M. le duc de Soto-Mayor [the Spanish Ambassador], M. Sainte-Beuve, M. Eugène Delacroix, M. Meyerbeer, M. Auber, M. Halévy, etc., etc. The young artist, while maintaining the most natural air in the world, always showed herself to be very much the great lady, giving proof of all those qualities of mind which are essential to the conquest of men of culture. . . . Like Célimène, mademoiselle Rachel makes it so much her business to be agreeable that her graciousness knows no distinctions of rank, fortune, position. Our Célimène has only to espy in the corner of a

drawing-room some shy and neglected person to overwhelm him with all her fascinations. Following the example of Saint-Simon's Prince de Conti, she must please her shoemaker, her footman, her chairman, just as she must captivate the cabinet-minister, the nobleman, and the field-marshal. This desire to please comes from her profession of actress; she must have the applause of pit and boxes, stalls and circle.

Night after night the Doctor watches the young player of whose progress he makes "*une idée fixe et une affaire.*" He finds in her the perfect expression of antique grief and pagan dolour, but has she "tears in the voice"? La Champmeslé, Adrienne Lecouvreur, La Duchesnois possessed an electric and a magnetic power over their audiences; the Doctor finds that in Rachel this power is lacking. Her delivery of a part is studied, she has "communicative sensibility," she has even the power to move profoundly. But sometimes, halfway to

her full effect, she comes to an unexpected stop, leaving her audience suspended in mid-air, unilluded, almost cold, and at best in a state of tranquillity. Her talent proceeds from intelligence and does not move the heart, for the reason that it is not addressed to the heart. For example, in the fourth act of *Horace*, in the scene in which Rachel learns of the death of her lover, her acting is grand, but it is the grandness of terror rather than of tears. Once the actress made confession to the Doctor of what was behind her playing in this scene. It appeared that she had been bled for a fever, which gave her the idea of reproducing on the stage the distress and faintness she had experienced from this operation! Again, we read that Rachel, though she had many of the great qualities of Talma, entirely lacked that great actor's power of springing a surprise and an explosion. Her effects were prepared beforehand and the spectator was ready for them. On the other hand she possessed quite per-

fectly the art of listening. She was interested in, could be excited and even moved to curiosity by, what was said to her on the stage; she listened with her eyes, her arms, and even her whole body.

What the Doctor can never quite make up his mind to say is that at which all Rachel's contemporary critics hinted—her lack of pathos. Charlotte Brontë, we remember, had no tears for Vashti. George Henry Lewes writes: "There always seemed something not human about Rachel. She seemed made of different clay from her fellows—beautiful but not lovable. . . . Scorn, triumph, rage, lust and merciless malignity she could represent in symbols of irresistible power; but she had little tenderness, no womanly caressing softness, no gaiety, no heartiness. She was so graceful and so powerful that her air of dignity was incomparable; but somehow you always felt in her presence an indefinable suggestion of latent

wickedness. By the side of Pasta she would have appeared like a beautiful devil beside a queenly woman: with more intellect, more incisive and impressive power, but with less soul, less diffusive and subduing influence."

And yet I don't know. The worst of dramatic critics is that they will not make up their minds about a thing and stick to it. Lewes has quite settled, has he not, that Rachel had no pathos? Now take his description of her Phèdre:

"Nothing I have ever seen surpassed this picture of a soul torn by the conflicts of incestuous passion and struggling conscience; the unutterable mournfulness of her look and tone as she recognized the guilt of her desires, yet felt herself so possessed by them that escape was impossible, are things never to be forgotten. What a picture she was as she entered! You felt that she was wasting away under the fire within, that she was standing on the verge of the grave with pallid face, hot eyes, ema-

ciated frame—an awful ghastly apparition. The slow, deep, mournful toning of her apostrophe to the sun, especially that close—

Soleil! je te viens voir pour la dernière fois—

produced a thrill which vibrates still in memory. The whole of the opening scene . . . was inexpressibly affecting and intensely true. As an ideal representation of real emotion, it belonged to the highest art. The remorseful lines—

Grâces au ciel, mes mains ne sont point criminelles:
Plût aux dieux que mon cœur fût innocent comme elles—

were charged with pathos. In the second act, where Phèdre declares her passion to Hippolyte, Rachel was transcendent. She subtly contrived to indicate that her passion was a diseased passion, fiery and irresistible, yet

odious to her and to him. She was marvellous in the abandonment to this onward-sweeping madness; her manner was fierce and rapid, as if the thoughts were crowding on her brain in tumult, and she dared not pause to consider them; and such was the amazing variety and compass of her expression that when she quitted the stage she left us quivering with an excitement comparable only to that produced by Kean in the third act of *Othello*. In the fourth act came the storm of rage, jealousy, and despair: it was lit up by wonderful flashes. Like Kean she had a power of concentrating into a single phrase a world of intense feeling; and even Kean himself could not have surpassed the terrific exclamation—

Misérable! et je vis!

Whoever saw Rachel play Phèdre may be pardoned if he doubt whether he will ever see such acting again."

As Hermione in *Andromaque*, we read, she added calm, polished, implacable, withering sarcasm to rage, scorn, grief, and defiance. The actress's thin frame became convulsed, her enunciation spasmodic, her voice hoarse; the demoniac element again revealed itself. In the *Polyeucte* of Corneille "she has one scene of incomparable grandeur, where, baptized in the blood of her martyred husband, she exclaims—

Son sang dont tes bourreaux viennent de me couvrir
M'a desillé les yeux, et me les vient d'ouvrir.
Je vois, je sais, je crois!

Hazlitt tells us that Kemble was tragedy turreted and crowned and crested, with its front gilt and bloodstained; but that unlike Macready, who raised tragedy from earth, Kemble lowered it from the skies. Rachel, one thinks, was a haggard edition of Kemble and performed the same office for French tragedy.

I shall not have space to recount her excur-

sions into French politics, of which not even German historians can make head or tail. But the newspapers of the time are invariably amusing, and I find a suspicion of irony in the description of "*cette jeune et jolie femme*" beplum'd, or better, toga'd in white, belaurelled, sunk on one knee, grasping the tricolour, and muttering the Marseillaise through clenched teeth. Had Rachel a smile? One may think she had, and that it was of Kemble's order, "like the plating on a coffin."

But to return to Véron—to whom I promise that we shall presently say good-bye. After telling us that Rachel existed by the theatre and for the theatre, that she could not live without the footlights, without beautiful verse to recite, without passions to simulate, a minister to seduce and an impresario to subjugate, that like the *grands seigneurs* of the late eighteenth century she delighted in low company and would spend whole nights in clandestine exploration of the town—after dropping these

only too obvious hints, Véron proceeds to a full-dress examination of his mistress's character. He asks whether the life of mademoiselle Rachel was free from those faults and weaknesses without which, the history of the theatre persuades him, the player's art falls short and the player remains incomplete. Adrienne Lecouvreur, like Rachel, was twice a mother—which is a point of resemblance in two romantic and agitated careers. We are warned against believing that Rachel was a dangerous, evil-minded woman, "since the graciousness with which she repairs her misdeeds is as sincere as the cruelty which devises them." But neither must we take too much on trust or let ourselves be carried away by amiabilities which will be forgotten tomorrow; nothing pleases mademoiselle Rachel better than to inspire a passion and then mock at it. She has been accused of cupidity; the truth is that, with her, prodigality and meanness rule in turn, that she will leave unexpected presents on your door-

step and in all probability call in a day or two and ask for them back again. *La donna è mobile*, and no contradictions are unknown to this changeable nature, "beneficent and calculating, angelic in devotion, demonic in malice, a nature urgent to use, abuse, and exhaust all the sensations of living."

Véron does not know whether in his study of mademoiselle Rachel he has shown her as lovable or the reverse, a figure to be esteemed or blamed. If we are fair we shall take into account—here the Doctor becomes rhetorical—the humble starting-point and the glorious destination before condemning the method of progress along a road strewn with thorns and pitfalls, traversed without money, without guide, without moral support. (Shade of Pecksniff!) By the side of ignoble impulses, impure reminders of that journey through undergrowth and marsh, it is for us to find noble instincts, a love of beauty, a passion for things of the mind, superior intelligence, a

kindly philosophy, and the charms of a natural elegance and distinction. When one is not with Rachel one becomes her enemy; when she is absent one remembers only her faults which then take on the aspect of crimes. And when she returns one is vanquished by her rare qualities, by her ravishing, deceitful charm. "Destiny," concludes the Doctor—and here one reflects that destiny was in a mood of mischief—"has thrown me among many actresses. I have never met one who was as singular and as extraordinary as mademoiselle Rachel, or who was torn by so many passions; nor have I known any actress who was so humble in origin or so stupendous in achievement. I cannot believe that Champmeslé, Duclos, Lecouvreur, Dumesnil, Gaussin, Clairon, and all those others hymned by the immortal poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were worthier of homage and honour than the great tragédienne of our day." Finally the Doctor regrets that Racine and Corneille cannot rise from their

graves to salute the last tragic muse, and deplores that the living poets Casimir Delavigne, Victor Hugo, and Lamartine have burnt no incense before her whom their verses might have sheltered from oblivion. Let us leave Véron regretting and deploring. No pose becomes him so well.

6

THE year is 1840 and Rachel is launched. De Musset is now her lover—but her liaison with the poet is an *affaire de tête* and will not last. Her lover presumptive is François d'Orléans, Prince de Joinville, third son of Louis-Philippe, who, having the wit to send the actress his visiting-card with the words:

Où?—Quand?—Combien?

receives the reply written on the same card:

Chez toi.—Ce soir.—Pour rien.

The Prince, a lady-killer and "a massacrer of such virtue as asked to be massacred," appears to have added sincerity to what at the beginning

was only a *toquade*. The affair lasted for some six or seven years, and the actress on her side appears to have been friendly with her lover to the end. The Prince, according to Hugo, was not princely; but he possessed a frank, open manner, a good figure, a good heart, wit, and a fund of animal spirits. The relations between the pair were as quarrelsome as they were tender. The Prince's letters to Rachel have disappeared—on her death-bed she had the generosity to send back to their writers all their love-letters—and of Rachel's to the Prince very few exist. One fragment is amusing. The jealous fellow has sent a letter complaining about infidelity or something of the sort, and, being snubbed, follows it up with a portfolio of apologies. Rachel accepts these, but regrets that she is obliged to leave Paris without seeing him. The fragment goes on: "*Mais non, tu feras qu'il en soit autrement, mon vieux chien, et puisque tu veux bien remuer ta queue en mon honneur, remue aussi les qua-*

tre pattes pour arriver à Paris." She declares that she will sleep that night with his letter under her pillow, and adds: "*Comme je vais l'embrasser, la câliner! mais je te promets de ne pas lui donner toutes mes caresses, si vous venez bien vite.*"

Rachel's affections are a house of many mansions. In June, 1840, she undertakes a provincial tour at Rouen where she spends a month. She has enormous success, her triumphs are celebrated by a local poet whose Muse gives birth to the immortal line:

La province, Rachel, c'est quelque chose aussi.

But Rachel is not bothering about triumph, poetry, or any nonsense of that sort. She is worried by a lover who scorns her. Who that lover was will never be known, as Rachel's letters to him are without name or address. But knowledge of her other relationships at this time makes it highly improbable that either Véron, Musset, or the Prince de Joinville is the

object of the lamentation of this "*Bérénice en tournée.*" From the correspondence it is obvious that at Rouen Rachel makes an assignation which her lover does not keep. She sends him a letter at his hotel, and the letter is returned. Rachel then writes this more than worried, desolating and, in the French, ill-spelt epistle:

Rouen, June, 1840.

It is eleven o'clock [the French is *il est* h*onze heures*]. I have just had supper, and have gone up to my room to commune with you who have so cruelly abandoned Rachel to disappointment and anxiety, and have for two days even left her without news. . . . I suppose she must learn to suffer in silence. In the meantime in the hope of seeing you arrive she has not left her balcony throughout the entire day. . . .

I should not complain if I were still certain of you, but everything is against certainty. Tell me what I have done, for I do not know, and in any case am not to blame for the last two

days. I wrote to you but it appears that my letter did not get further than the porter's lodge. As for this note I am determined that you shall read it, for I shall myself put it into the hands of a commissionaire.

I leave for Havre tomorrow at four o'clock. Needs must that I go alone, since you have refused to make the journey with one who loves you so dearly!

How could you treat me so at the theatre the other night? You cannot know what I suffered!

And yet this letter is not entirely without its bright side; I will tell you the reason and you will understand. They threw me no flowers yesterday; yet I was happy, for you applauded me. I saw you. I followed you with my eyes which never left you the entire evening. I owe it to you that my performance was even moderately good; so you see that whatever happens my art cannot afford to let you go. If you have a shred of friendship left, answer my

letter. You are the master, and I would send you a thousand kisses but that I fear my master's displeasure. Your devoted Rachel awaits her permission.

There is no answer. Rachel goes to Havre, returns to Rouen in two days' time, and again writes:

It is five o'clock and I am just back from Havre. My first question on arriving at the hôtel was to ask if there was a reply to my letter. They told me, none. Is this the end, and do you never want to see your Rachel any more? For God's sake answer!

Let me at least come to see you. . . . Your silence is cruel. . . . Give me the chance to justify myself, if there is question of justification. . . . If you are afraid to write, send me word Yes or No.

I cannot rest without a line from you, one little line.

RACHEL.

And there the correspondence ends. But four days after her death *Le Figaro* published a letter which can be related to no other known affair of Rachel's, and would seem to be a reply to a response extracted at last from this unwilling lover:

. . . Your letter is unfair. What harm have I ever done you? Why heap reproaches on me when I am suffering more than ever before? Is it possible that you did not realize the extent of my suffering since, on the strength of a word dashed off to you in despair, you treat me thus? You are right—I ought to have foreseen what the world would say about me. And, of course, I did foresee it. But you must make allowances for me; I have only just slipped into that whirlpool which you call society, and you demand that I shall behave like one who knows her way about. I cannot help it if I am inexperienced, but is it the part of a friend to leave me at the mercy of my temperament?

You cannot blame my heart, since that is responsible only for those of my letters which are all tenderness and love. In any case I shall not go away. I intended to tell you definitely the date on which I hope to return to Paris, but now I haven't the courage. Perhaps you don't care whether I tell you the date or not. I shall wait till you ask for it.

RACHEL.

And now for something else. A fragment of a letter written from Holland during the second tour of 1847 shows the actress with her nerves on edge, wrought up after a terrific performance and consequently in a mood which moralists would do well to take into account:

My tour is going capitally; in the matter of money and health all is well. The heat is not too great and I am not too fatigued. On these counts success is great, but at the cost, I am afraid, of health and life. The excitement

which comes from an enthusiastic public gets into my blood and sets it boiling. Do you think it is agreeable after the tumult of a great reception to return to my hotel, eat a lonely supper, and crawl miserably to bed? No! But that is what I am condemned to. The public and the world consider only the artist; they forget the woman.

In the same year—1847—she writes the famous letter to sister Sarah:

My dear Sarah,—No doubt you will be surprised to see my handwriting so often. But the letter which I have just received from Emile seems to me so affectionate, so charming, and so full of something which is really love that I must send on to you what I deem to be a masterpiece of passion. Thank Heaven, Old Michonnet, my true servant—by which I mean the theatre—will still be here to console me in the case of another disappointment. As for

you, dear old girl, I am sure you will neither eat nor sleep till you have written me a letter full of nonsense. I am sadly in need of a laugh, and I hereby appoint you to the witty and gracious post of court-jester. Fix your own salary. *Je suis décidée à rentrer grosse en France, dont le chagrin doit être exclu. En avant, roule tambour, et, comme Paillasse, faisons trois sauts en arrière et tout sera dit.*

I love you and send you a thousand kisses. Just off to play Camille. RACHEL.

June 13*th.*

Who is this Emile? Is it not obviously Emile de Girardin, whose liaison with Rachel was not made public until 1865, when this letter with twenty-four others was included in the sale of the collection belonging to M. Félix Drouin? The twenty-five letters, all of them addressed to sister Sarah, were sold for 227 francs. "Intimate and piquant correspondence," said the auctioneer. Now Sarah was still living in 1865

—she did not die until 1877—and living in Paris, where the sale took place. Still in the enjoyment of the yearly income of 6,000 francs left her by Rachel, the *soupeuse vaillante* could allow her dead sister's most secret confidences to be blown about the journalistic world—all for 227 francs. And here the reader may ask how the letters first came to pass out of Sarah's possession into that of M. Drouin? The answer is simple. Sarah also was daughter to Jacob Félix. Of the second it was said that she never found the sentiment of love incompatible with the sense of business. The first, it appears, could reconcile sentiment for a dead sister with a sense of the value of 227 francs.

7

It would take too long to record in detail the broils with the Comédie in which papa Félix, who looked after the financial end of the Rachel stick, successfully engaged his daughter —broils as a result of which Rachel spent half her life oscillating between resignation and re-entry. A cartoon of 1854 shows her knocking at the door of the Théâtre Français and bears the legend:

La 999e rentrée de Mlle. Rachel
C'est insupportable une Sociétaire qui ne fait que rentrer et sortir.

Papa Félix never hesitated at any time to put the screw on the Comédie. Rachel's first eighteen performances brought receipts of 13,000

francs; her next eighteen brought 88,000 francs—a total of just over 100,000 francs. Rachel's contract being for 4,000 francs a year, and the time taken to garner these receipts five months, it follows that the débutante had been paid less than 2,000 francs, and consequently less than one-fiftieth of the receipts which her talent, and her talent alone, had brought forth. Védel, the director of the Comédie, realized that contract or no contract the Félix family—for Rachel was a corporation—was not going to be satisfied with a yearly salary of 4,000 francs when the takings of a single performance exceeded 6,000. Rachel made her début in June, and in October Védel doubled her salary without her asking for it. At the end of November he added a monthly bonus of 1,000 francs, which brought the whole amount up to 20,000 francs. This measure was approved by the majority of Védel's colleagues, and disapproved by an over-thrifty minority! But the event proved that Védel had been

penny-foolish and pound-wise. Papa Félix suddenly demanded an increase up to 40,000 francs. Of this demand Védel reports succinctly: "I took occasion to let the old blackguard know of my previous generosity, and that took the wind out of his sails." In 1840, on the attainment of her majority, Rachel made a fresh engagement—a retaining fee of 27,000 francs, a salary of 18,000 francs, a benefit performance with a fixed minimum of 15,000 francs—or 60,000 francs in all. In those days this was an enormous sum of money; still it cannot be denied that the Comédie made a good bargain, as the receipts from Rachel's first hundred performances amounted to 452,595 francs 13 centimes. In addition Rachel was entitled each year to a holiday of three months, which holiday she utilized to swell her treasury by some further 40,000 francs. Given the caprice of the great actress, which is only one degree less extravagant than that of the *prima donna,* it is not surprising that Rachel twisted her di-

rectorate round her little finger. She would play when it pleased her—not otherwise. It suited her to be at daggers drawn with Buloz, Védel's successor; and whatever Buloz might say or do, at daggers drawn she remained. The following letter is typical:

My dear Monsieur Buloz,

You must realize that if I play on Thursday I cannot play on Saturday, and that in consequence the theatre is not going to gain anything by your proposed change. Thursday is the opening of the Chamber and, I repeat, I will play if I can. It is quite true that my cold did not prevent me from going to see *Virginius* for the simple reason that as I am about to create a Virginie it was obviously my duty to see the English piece. But although my cold did not keep me from the English actors, I am quite certain that it will not allow me to play Roxane. In witness whereof let me tell you

that I have only just enough strength to crawl home.

You lecture me upon what you suggest should be my devotion to your theatre; let me tell you that I have given a thousand proofs of such devotion! At this very moment the doctors are telling me that I ought not to play before January. Yet I have promised you to play long before that date. However, do exactly as you like. Put my name on the bill, and if I can I will play. *But if I can't* it won't be my fault, as I have told you all about it beforehand.

Compliments. RACHEL.

At another time she writes to him: "Why not get it into your head that it is as much in my interest as in that of the theatre to play rather than lie up in bed?" If Buloz insists upon her acting when she is not fit she will be ill for a fortnight, and what about the three

performances which the Comédie will then be forced to miss? Is it not better to play when she can, rather than not at all? "These French actresses have you all under their thumb!" exclaimed Mlle. George to Victor Hugo. "Rachel makes a fresh contract, with heaps of gold and any amount of holidays. Then, when the contract is signed, she says: 'Oh, and by the way, I forgot to tell you that I'm going to have a baby. I shan't be able to play for—let me see —five months.' I tell you, Rachel's no fool. If I had had her impudence I should not now be in the gutter, starving." In 1848 Rachel writes to the manager of the Comédie that she is so ill that she cannot appear for six weeks. And the manager scribbles in the margin of the note: "Mlle. Rachel's illness is all my eye; what she is after is M. Buloz's resignation." And, in effect, during the course of that year Buloz did resign. But being entirely feminine, Rachel could scratch with one hand and caress with the other. Thus we find her

writing to her old enemy in the friendliest strain:

London, June 15, 1841.

I have never for a moment doubted the interest you have always been kind enough to take in my success. Let me assure you that I am glad for the theatre's sake as for my own, that I regard my triumphs as so many encouragements in the career which is to be my life's happiness. You ask for details, but what can I tell you? Every character has meant a fresh victory—Hermione, Roxane, Camille, Marie Stuart, every part has been so tremendously applauded that really I don't know which they have liked best. Possibly Hermione was the most effective, perhaps because Hermione's effectiveness is the kind the English appreciate best. It is all wrong to imagine that they have no understanding. I am constantly astonished by the way in which they seize the fine points. It even seems to me sometimes that I am being

judged by the standard of my kind-hearted, intelligent, Parisian public. The stage is snowed under with flowers every night, and really I am becoming quite spoiled. That is why I am giving up the idea of going to Marseilles, although the strain which the journey would put upon my health counts for something in my decision. The doctor is anxious about the July heat in that part of the world. And since I am really in capital fettle here and quite acclimatized, and the Queen herself absolutely insists on paying Marseilles out of her own purse the 15,000 francs' forfeit—well, you can realize, my dear Monsieur Buloz, can't you, that I have decided not to budge? As for my future plans, here they are. I shall leave London on July 15th, go through with the Bordeaux trip, and return to Paris about the 20th August, after which I shall want two months for rest and study. Please don't think, however, that I am idle in London. I have got Chimène, Frédégonde, and Jeanne d'Arc by heart. I haven't, of

course, finished the complete study, but at least I know the words, and it will be my privilege and joy to create all three parts for you this winter on the stage which I love so well, and which you are good enough to call my home.

In 1842 Rachel was invited to become a *Sociétaire* of the Comédie Française, and accepted. But finding there were obligations attached to this honour she pleaded grave considerations of health and went to the Courts to get her contract cancelled. Having succeeded in this she calmly re-entered the Comédie as an ordinary *pensionnaire,* and successfully stipulated for an increased salary with an annual holiday of six months. Two years later, she decided once more to become a *Sociétaire*, and the brow-beaten Comédie again acceded to her wish. Yet in spite of the enormous sums earned by Rachel it is doubtful whether on the whole the Comédie gained by her except in the matter of glory. Sarcey says definitely that it did not.

When Rachel's name was on the bill the house was crowded; when it was not, the house was empty. During her holidays, her absences on leave authorized and unauthorized, and the weeks taken up by quarrels which invariably ended in prolonged sulks, it was impossible for the Comédie to find any attraction which would draw the public. During seventeen years Rachel might at any moment have said, and said justifiably: "*La Comédie Française—c'est moi!*"

Not that Rachel was immune from failure. She had her failures, and, like everything else about Rachel, they were magnificent. Not even the "*fille des morts*" can be content with a répertoire composed exclusively of those classical fogeys, Corneille and Racine. And therefore Rachel looked round for what a later actress was to find—a Sardou. She found one, but with this difference, that whereas the master-spirit of fustian and play-tailoring supplied successes, the speciality of Madame de Girardin was to provide failures. This lady wrote for Rachel, and

Rachel performed, tragedies on the subjects of Judith, Cleopatra, and Lady Tartufe. (Her pen took the liberty of writing, one day when its owner's ponderous mind was on a journey, the charming little piece entitled *La Joie Fait Peur*. Rachel did not play in this.) Now Delphine was a Muse and, like all the other literary celebrities of the time, had a salon. Madame Crémieux, we remember, aspired to that which Delphine proudly owned. In this salon the Muse was alleged to entertain Gautier and Balzac, de Musset and Hugo; all that is certain is that the Muse bored her husband stiff. For Emile de Girardin was not of the temper to live happily with a George Sand. He respected and admired his Delphine, of whom he also claimed to be proud "as one might be proud of an ancestor." But he was bored. Then one day, by singular good fortune, he entered his wife's drawing-room at the moment when Delphine, always a tower of virtue, had played the fortress to such good account that a

would-be lover, after turning his arquebus on himself, had expired at her feet. Girardin, delighted, refused to accept any explanation, and was quick to seize the incident as the excuse for a life of organized irregularity. He began by making Rachel his mistress, and his mistress Rachel remained until one Esther Guimont, who had an intervening claim upon the husband of the Muse, wrote to the actress and bade her keep off the grass.

The letter crossed with one in which Rachel obviously desired to placate the fury. She had written:

Dear M. de Girardin,

I was expecting a line from you all morning. In what way am I in the wrong? I have been thinking all night of the trouble which I have so unwittingly caused you. As for the woman who has behaved to me in such an extraordinary fashion, I cannot find it in my heart to be angry with her. For *she admires you*, and the noble

sentiments by which she finds herself attached to you must raise her in my esteem. I rely upon you to convince her of my innocence in the matter of all that scheming of which she suspects me. Tell her that I have forgotten her moment of temper, and shall be happy to shake the hand of a woman whose heart beats in the generous way she has allowed me to observe. Cherish her, dear M. de Girardin! You have suffered sufficiently at home to deserve whatever happiness you can find in a love as sincere and as single as that which this woman offers you. I hope that she will not deprive me of the pleasure of seeing you from time to time, being persuaded as she now must be, and as you and I always have been, of the platonic nature of our friendship.

So Rachel did as she was bid, and resigned her lover to the determined Esther. The explosion was not heard in the Muse's drawing-room, but there are ingenious speculations as

to its repercussions. Esther's letter was dated 18th of March, and it is possible to see significance in the fact that Walewski broke with Rachel soon after. The Count married on the following 4th of June. The suggestion is that an "incident" took place between Walewski and Girardin, since we cannot identify in any other connection an entertaining note from Rachel to Emile, which has among others this delightful phrase: "*Je suis ravie de votre lettre; elle est forte comme un homme et méchante comme une femme; elle est complète.*" In marrying, Walewski took his son away from Rachel; and here I must acknowledge my debt to M. Louis Barthou for the letter which prior to his admirable monograph, had been known only in fragments:

Yes, indeed, my heart is broken, all feeling annihilated. In trampling on my heart as you have done, Alexandre, you have filled my whole being with misery. Nothing is left to me—

neither love nor affection nor any sentiment to make life bearable. Why should I who am so young be so afflicted? Nothing is left, and I am without hope. Only one desire remains to me, and that is to withdraw into the solitude of my own soul. *You call me a monster!* But you, do you think you are not to blame? What pains have *you* borne for the child whom you dare to take from me? And as if that were not enough, your servants, incredible though it sounds, have rained humiliations upon me. By your orders a woman upon whom I have heaped favours has dared, without a blush or a word of excuse, to repeat to me certain words of yours, words which it is impossible that I should put on paper. If I could overlook such an outrage I should indeed be a monster! Give me back my child, and I will retire from the world and live in seclusion with him. To remain worthy of my son I will trample on nature itself; my heart shall be open to my boy alone, and my whole life prove too short to wear out

my tenderness for him, to exhaust my devotion and my love. But if you persist in taking the son from his mother and dethroning her in his affections I warn you that I shall go straight to hell, and the devil can look after the rest. My future depends upon you, and once more my soul and my fate are in your hands.

This letter had the result it was intended to have.

But it is time to return to Delphine, whom we left composing *Judith*. It was on April 24th, 1843, when Rachel's friendship with Emile was still all that a Guimont could have desired, that the tragedy of *Judith* befell. Delphine had opened the ball by defending Rachel against the attacks of the anti-Semites. She admitted that Rachel was a Jewess, and that whenever she played the seats which did not belong to subscribers were taken almost exclusively by Jews. And why should they not be, asks Delphine? Are we not to admire that

loyalty which is as quick to applaud Jewish genius as it is to succour Jewish misfortune? And Delphine concludes that Rachel is applauded nightly by playgoers who have known Talma, Raucourt, Duchesnois, and are not Jews at all. At once Rachel, quick to see the advantage of support from without the Israelite camp, pays Delphine a ceremonious call. The Muse finds her charming, and writes to Lamartine to say that she has quite the grand air, and does not in the least look like the daughter of gypsies. Next Rachel, with the thoroughness of her race, insists upon appearing in a tragedy from the Delphinian pen! The pen does not refuse—and *Judith* attains fourteen agonizing performances. Two things and two only contribute to a disastrous first-night—Delphine's lack of talent for playwriting and a stray cat which, answering wailings with wailings and engaging in its capture the entire stage-population of Asia Minor, plunges the whole theatre in delirium. "*La bestiole se planta au milieu de la*

scène d'un air assez effaré. Aux lamentations de la veuve de Béthulie, elle répondit par un long miaulement. On lui dut faire la chasse derrière les décors. Toujours miaulante, elle cabriolait de portant en portant, escaladant les 'lointains,' cavalcadant dans les 'fonds.' Le chat parut plus plaisant que la tragique héroïne. On s'intéressa à sa capture. Demandez donc, dans ces conditions, à une salle de première, de garder son sérieux! Le chat eut du moins cet avantage pour Mme. de Girardin, c'est qu'il fit tomber sa pièce parmi les rires, au lieu des baîllements."

Three years later, and again with Rachel as accomplice, Delphine perpetrated *Cléopâtre*, declared by a contemporary critic to be the most detestable of all melodramas filched from antiquity. I give a short selection, for the benefit of those who would like to know how bad a French tragedy can be, and to what depths a French poetess and a French tragédienne can descend. The speakers are a slave

and Cleopatra, and it is the slave who holds forth:

Est-ce toi qu'on oublie?
Va, tu ne connais pas la force d'un regret,
Ni la tenacité d'un dévorant secret.
On peut vivre sans pain dans des murs qu'on assiège,
On peut vivre sans feu dans des déserts de neige,
On peut vivre sans eau dans le sable Africain,
On peut vivre sans air dans l'antre de Vulcain,
Mais dans cette démence où ma tête est bercée,
On ne pourrait vivre un jour sans ta pensée!
Un jour sans t'évoquer, sans t'appeler vingt fois,
Sans chercher à surprendre un accent de ta voix,
Sans aspirer l'air pur que ta bouche respire,
Sans se courber joyeux et fier sous ton empire,

O, reine, ne crains rien, il t'aime, et plus encor
L'avare n'a jamais dédaigné son trésor,
Et celui qui t'aime n'a ni repos ni trêve,
Il n'a plus qu'un espoir, il n'a plus qu'un seul rêve,
C'est de vivre pour toi, de te donner ses jours.
Et s'il souffre, sa joie est de souffrir toujours.

Here Cleopatra exclaims:

Il reviendra!

But the slave is not to be put off. He continues:

Tremblant, redemander sa chaîne,
Il t'aime, il t'aime encor, je le sens à ma haine.
Tu peux me croire, moi, son tourment est le mien:
Va, lis dans mon amour les promesses du sien.

And the Queen of Egypt, brushing aside her domestic's pretty proposal, says briskly:

Mais ce n'est pas sa voix? j'ai cru la reconnaître.

Whereupon the slave, bethinking him of his skin, has the prudent aside:

Esclave, cache toi, voici venir le maître!

J'ever, as my Lord Castlewood might have asked, know such rubbish? But when Rachel was determined to pay a debt she paid it, and with interest. *Cléopâtre* expired after eight performances. There was also *Rosemonde,* a tragedy by one Latour-Saint-Ybars, of which and of whom nothing remains except Samson's quip, published anonymously:

Pourquoi donc nomme-t-on ce drame 'Rosemonde'?
Je n'y vois plus de rose et n'y vois pas de monde.

Even when Rachel's choice was not dictated by gratitude it could fall upon something almost

as unhappy. Fourteen was the number of performances accorded to *Catherine II,* a five-act tragedy by a M. Romand, who appears to have been dreadfully upset by the failure of his piece and to have thrown the blame on Rachel. He makes a scene and we cannot be quite sure on whose account he is jealous—his own or that of his play—since we have only Rachel's reply. And a very witty reply it is:

What has put it into your head, I should like to know, that I was at some Duchess's last night reciting *Polyeucte* and *Phèdre*? Am I a knock-about tragédienne? Or are you mistaking me for somebody else? It is quite true that I was not at home when you called; but as for reciting at a party you are entirely mistaken. And may I kindly enquire what you mean by trying to bribe my servants to tell you where I was? Even if you had succeeded all that they could have told you is that you are horribly jealous, which you know already, and that you

are unbearable, which you may as well learn. But at least you are not as unbearable as that abominable *Catherine* of yours, who makes me bitterly regret that I ever took her on. The interminable rehearsals tire me out, all the more because I have no enthusiasm for your piece, and that I see perfectly well that all my trouble will only end in failure. I do not feel, as I almost always do, that the thing is going to be a success; the piece is moderately good, of course, but it remains thin and cold, however much I try to warm up those icy tirades of yours. By the way I intend to have a beautiful costume, since it is all to the good of your play that people should look at me rather than listen to me. During the performance I have made up my mind to look exactly like you when you plant yourself in front of me as if you were an astrologer seeking to divine his happiness in the eyes of his fair lady, always supposing that astrologers have fair ladies! . . .

And now, *au revoir*, my dear star-gazer. . . .

The night is dark, so don't fall down any wells but go on thinking of me. I will make it up to you for your lost evening of yesterday, your lonely dinner, and perhaps for other things as well, you jealous old thing! *Fi! . . . Otello! . . . allez vous cacher . . . et aussi vous coucher, car minuit vont sonner.*

YOUR RACHEL.

P.S. In any case I am a more generous creature than you imagine, and to prove it I am sending you this little note so that your mind will be at ease first thing in the morning. If you really want to know the truth, I dined last night quite simply at home, just the four of us . . . papa Félix, mama Félix, and Sarah. So you see, vile and disgusting tyrant that you are, how a poor little innocent may be suspected unjustly!

8

RACHEL'S capriciousness has its best illustration in the history of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. "This play," writes Legouvé, who was Scribe's collaborator in the famous old piece, "was composed at the request, almost at the prayer, of Mlle. Rachel. But the few months which we took to write the piece were employed by Mlle. Rachel in growing disgusted with it." Other people, it seems, had been putting in their spokes. Hermione to talk prose! The representative of Corneille and Racine, the "daughter of the dead," to become the protégée of a Scribe! Such a profanation could not be allowed. So Rachel turns up at the first reading entirely resolved to have nothing to do with the piece which she has commanded. The entire personnel of the Comédie is present. And

as Rachel throughout five long acts declines to smile, applaud, approve, the committee, obedient to cue, shows equal firmness in declining to smile, applaud, approve. The reading ends in complete silence, and Scribe and Legouvé go into the director's study. They are followed by the director who, with a thousand regrets, is sorry to inform them that Mlle. Rachel does not "see herself" in the piece.

Six months later and upon the appointment of a new director Legouvé makes fresh proposals. Mlle. Rachel cannot really desire to offend a great playwright like M. Scribe. If she will hear the piece read again at her own house and before an audience to be chosen entirely by herself, Legouvé will come without M. Scribe. Rachel accepts, saying that she cannot refuse M. Legouvé, but that nothing will induce her to dabble in that . . . Here the author of *Soixante Ans de Souvenirs* hesitates to set down a word which is "strictly outside the classical repertory." On the day

appointed Legouvé arrives, and receives a welcome in which the actress exhausts her entire stocks of grace and charm. Rachel herself prepares the glass of sweetened water, advances a chair, arranges the curtains to give the best light. How—Legouvé is impressed—can one accuse of prejudice an actress so obviously willing to be delighted? During the first act Rachel applauds, approves, smiles, for the simple reason that Adrienne does not appear in that act, and Rachel has no objections to the play but only to the rôle in which she does not "see herself." But she has forgotten to warn her friends of the manœuvre, and seeing Rachel in high feather the audience permits itself to become genuinely enthusiastic. In the second act Adrienne appears, studying the rôle of Bajazet. The Prince de Bouillon asks Adrienne what she is seeking, and Adrienne looking up replies: "Truth!" "Bravo!" cried Jules Janin, who was one of the judges appointed by Rachel. Rachel shot

one of her famous bolts at the offending traitor. At the end of the second act, which was loudly applauded, the actress said weakly: "Yes, this act always seemed to me to be the best." After which she threw up the sponge, laughed, sobbed and cried out repeatedly: "What a fool I've been!" The rehearsals were stormy. "It rings false!" said Rachel, with reference to the famous fifth-act cry of "Ah! Maurice!" "It rings false because you don't know how to say it!" retorted Scribe; and for three days they rehearsed that one line.

It is to the last rehearsal of this piece that is attached perhaps the most pathetic story about Rachel. It was midnight, all the other actors had gone home, the footlights had been turned out, and the theatre was in darkness save for the gas-jet by the prompter's box. There was nobody in the theatre except Regnier, an actor called Maillard, the fireman, Rachel, and Legouvé. And then and there the

actress insisted upon rehearsing Adrienne's death-scene. Never had she died so well, Legouvé told her, suggesting that in the absence of an audience she had hypnotized herself into believing that she was Adrienne. To which Rachel returned the following: "You are wrong. What was happening in me was something stranger still: I was weeping not for Adrienne but for myself! Something told me at that moment that I, too, should die young, and it seemed to me that I was in my room, that my last hour had come, that I was looking on at my own death. When I broke down at 'Farewell, my triumphs of the stage! Farewell, my art which I have loved so well!' it was because I realized that the time is coming when no trace will be left of my talent, and nothing at all of her who once was Rachel!"

It was during the rehearsals of *Médée*, which followed shortly after, that the following very significant conversation took place:

RACHEL: Once in my life I met a man, evil of heart and mind but possessed of a first-class intelligence. That man had great influence over me. I cursed him—and yielded.

LEGOUVÉ: Why?

RACHEL: Why, why? Why do you clever men—at least you think yourselves clever—behave like moles when it is a question of a woman and an actress? Why should I yield to a man for whom I had nothing but loathing? Because he had me in his power. Because he blackmailed me. Because he hinted that he could be of use to me in my career. Yet if I must speak the absolute truth, I am not at all sure that his vileness had not a certain attraction for me. Yet I hated him so much that one day, before I went on for the first act of *Marie Stuart*, I put a pistol in my pocket with the deliberate intention of walking down to the stage-box where he had the impertinence to install himself every evening and of killing him then and there!

To whom does this refer? To whom can it refer if not to Véron, low in mind and heart, the possessor of an elevated intelligence? To whom if not the man in whose Mémoires we read: "*J'ai suivi seul, non distrait,* dans une avant-scène de rez-de-chaussée du Théâtre-Français, loge alors profonde, obscure, d'où l'on ne pouvait voir la salle, d'où l'on ne pouvait être vu, *de nombreuses représentations de mademoiselle Rachel*"? Is not the box to which Véron refers the "*loge de baignoire d'avant-scène, où il venait trôner insolemment tous les soirs où je jouais*"?

Médée was never played by Rachel who, after rehearsing it to perfection betook herself to Russia. Legouvé brought an action at law, and won. Rachel appealed and, losing her appeal, had to pay damages of 6,000 francs. Years later, *Médée* was played by the great actress, Adelaide Ristori, who achieved in it one of her most remarkable successes. Yet Rachel, though she recognized in Ristori a

dangerously successful rival, could by a sudden access of generosity overwhelm Legouvé with congratulations. Perhaps it is this not very good playwright who summed up Rachel more convincingly than anybody else of her time; and the following passage seems to me to bear this out:

Rachel rang alternately true and false. She was at once mountebank and Roman virgin. Though her mask was that of a tragédienne, her voice, her gait, and even her intelligence belonged to the comic stage; she was a comédienne at heart. One day after leaving a great house where she had played the great lady, and feeling that she must at all costs "unduchess" herself, she fell to putting her fingers to her nose. This gesture is entirely characteristic of the many-sided woman who loved opposites and clashes of all kinds. The essential Rachel, which kept to the surface and would never be denied, was the guttersnipe,[1]

[1] Legouvé's phrase is, "*Un fond de titi gouailleur.*"

the street-arab who speaks all the dialects known to Paris, changes his vocabulary at will, and gets his greatest fun in life out of laying traps for the respectability of the pavement.

Rachel was the mistress of the unexpected, behaving either generously or vilely as it suited her whim. Charmingly attentive, and loyally effacing herself at a benefit performance accorded to Mlle. Mars, she behaved to her other great predecessor, Mlle. George, with extraordinary and even inexplicable heartlessness. It is possible of course that, in our modern phrase, Mlle. George asked for it. "I have not seen *Adrienne Lecouvreur*," said the old lady, "but I am told that Rachel is extremely bad in it. She hurls phrases at, and shakes her fist in the nose of, a Duchess who would have jolly well shown her the door!" However that may have been, George humbled herself before her young rival to the extent of asking for her assistance at her farewell benefit. No French-

man can let the farewell of a classic star pass without rhetoric, and accordingly we encounter in connection with George's disappearance this burst of enthusiasm: "George, the last of the great romantic actresses, alone remained standing, a column crumbling but not in ruins. Dorval was dead; Mars was dead; alone George held the field like a soldier forgotten in the night of death and battle. Last moving spar of the heroic age, it was to the obsequies of her glory and the triumphal funeral of her belaurelled past that she invited her admirers. . . ."

Unhappily, the old lady bethought her of Rachel, and the story of Rachel's behaviour on this occasion is best told by George herself. She goes to see Victor Hugo, and to him she says: "Being horribly hard-up I took my courage in both hands and went to see Rachel—Mademoiselle Rachel, I mean—to ask her to play in *Rodogune* with me at my benefit. She would not see me and sent word that I was to

write to her. No, thank you! Low though I may have sunk, I haven't sunk as low as that! I have been as big an actress as Rachel and as great a whore; and the day is coming when she'll be poor and old like me. No, I will not write to Rachel. I will not dance attendance on the slut! Has she forgotten that she used to beg? Does it ever occur to her that some day she will beg again? It was in the cafés, Monsieur Hugo, and they threw her two sous! Think of that! And now it pleases her to play lansquenet at Véron's for pound-points, and win or lose ten thousand francs a night. But I tell you that in thirty years she won't have a farthing and her stockings will be full of holes! I tell you that in thirty years she may not be as proud to call herself Rachel as I am proud to call myself George. The day is coming when some talented chit will crop up and trample on Rachel, and Rachel will go down on her belly to her, you'll see! The proof that she will crawl is that she is insolent today. No, I won't

go near Rachel and I won't write. It's true that I'm starving, that I owe ten francs to my porter, that I've sold the Emperor's diamonds to my pawnbroker. It's true that I play at the Saint-Marcel, at the Batignolles, in the suburbs, and haven't a shilling for my cab. But I will not write to Rachel. I would rather drown!"

However, George did not drown herself but approached Samson, who approached Rachel, who now consented. The performance took place on Sunday, May 27th, 1849, and the bill consisted of *Iphigénie en Aulide*, with George as Clytemnestre and Rachel as Eriphyle. In addition Rachel was to play *Le Moineau de Lesbie*, there was to be a farce, and Mme. Viardot was to sing. Now it happens that in so far as anybody except Agamemnon and Ulysses is allowed to get in a word edgeways, Racine's play is a gift for Clytemnestre. And in this gift-part Mlle. George, of malice aforethought, applied herself to the job of dwarfing her rival. Janin, describing the scene, said that

the two actresses circled round one another like vipers seeking an opening, that the younger woman appeared nervous in the presence of so much force and brilliance, pride, majesty, and rage, and that the older used her last remaining energy to tear the orb and sceptre from the hands of her who had usurped them. In the middle of the play the house began to take sides, and it became evident that the greater part of the spectators were for George. At one point Rachel was even hissed, which naturally encouraged George to still greater efforts. When, finally, the curtain came down and both actresses were called George appeared alone; Rachel, looking like the three furies put together, had left the theatre. Next day she obtained from her director three months' leave of absence *on account of her health*, set out on a provincial tour, travelled the length and breadth of France by carriage, popped over to Guernsey, and gave seventy-four performances in ninety days.

9

SOMETHING must now be said about Hector B——, to whom Rachel was for many months fantastically betrothed. But first to dispose of Arthur Bertrand. Bertrand was the son of the Count Bertrand who was Napoleon's devoted friend. Born in St. Helena in 1817, he returned to France with his family in 1821, and at the age of fourteen plunged into the life of the Parisian underworld, from which it goes without saying that he never emerged. At seventeen he became the lover of the comédienne Déjazet, who was thirty-six—a liaison contracted under the auspices of his mother! On Déjazet's being presented to Mme. Bertrand, that good lady and, according to French views, good mother had been wholly conquered. On the day after the presentation the Countess

sent to her son's mistress a lock of the Emperor's hair with this note: "It is with the greatest pleasure, Madame, that I send you the precious lock that you desire. I shall be always happy to serve you. I am grateful and, as I told you, I hold you in my affectionate regard."

It would be wrong to suppose that there is any kind of relationship between the Fanny Bertrand of 1834 and the English mother of a seventeen-year-old schoolboy at this or any other time. The Englishwoman who should deliberately throw her son into the arms of a respectable *cocotte* lest worse befall would never again take tea in decent society. The French are different. I would not be understood to say that they are more enlightened: that they should be recognized as different is enough. Since, then, it is a Frenchwoman with whom we are dealing we find no irony in the comment: "Mme. Bertrand's letter does honour to Déjazet. Reading between the lines

we perceive the almost maternal quality of tenderness felt by the actress for the boy of seventeen whom she would shield from the dangers of dissipation on the grand scale." But Bertrand had no intention of avoiding dangers on any scale, grand or homely. At the same time that he suffered his mistress to mother him he played the sedulous ape to the town rowdies, drank, gambled, sponged. For five years the quasi-maternal relations continued, until at last Déjazet realized that the young rip was beyond saving, and resigned her claims upon him.

The previous year had found Déjazet and Rachel exchanging civilities. The forty-year-old comédienne invites the eighteen-year-old tragédienne to spend the day with her. Rachel declines, and through the fulsome regrets one perceives a certain impertinence. She has played Monime on the previous evening; she is coughing; the weather is wet; she must keep indoors; she has to renounce the joys of this

world; she has been wretched too recently and fears the sudden access of too much happiness; etc., etc. Yet this is the period of the little suppers *chez* Véron, referring to which Mlle. George said in that straightforward way of hers: "What keeps Rachel in the public eye is the champagne she drinks, the life she leads, and the moneyed fools who flock round her. Let her lead a decent life for a couple of months and nobody will remember that she exists."

It was in 1840 that Arthur Bertrand was presented to Rachel, probably by Déjazet, the year in which the young man was included in the expedition sent to St. Helena to bring back the ashes of the Emperor. The head of the mission was the Prince de Joinville! Joinville, Walewski, Bertrand—Rachel had sufficient sense of style to keep, whenever possible, to the royal or imperial traditions. Her Arthur was the last page in the Napoleonic epic. And now began the amusing comedy which Rachel con-

trived to take so seriously. On the one side was Bertrand, the gambler broken at twenty-two, with a baby face which could blush as easily as a girl's and the habit of borrowing from his mistresses the money to pay his debts. On the other side was Rachel, of Shylock's race and, what is more to the point, the daughter of papa Félix. Hitherto Rachel, though possibly not loving for money, had always loved where money was, and it was outside the rules that her new lover should be penniless. But to contribute pennies is another matter, and Rachel was not in the least likely to confuse the two. Did Bertrand endeavour to "touch" Rachel? I think not, and for the simple reason that Rachel forestalled him.

If Arthur is speaking the truth and is really sad at not having embraced his little wife this evening, Rachel enjoins him to forget what she said this morning and to come round to-night after the performance at the Gaieté. He

can bring Sarah, but she must sup first if she is hungry, for there is nothing in the house except happiness.

Arthur's adoring little wife,

RACHEL.

P. S. If Arthur is indulging in lansquenet he must take care to win. Rachel's brother has cleaned her out, and the money-box is empty.

To Arthur Rachel was intermittently faithful during seven years. Their child, Gabriel-Victor Félix—for he was never legitimized—was born on January 26th, 1848, some three months after Rachel's creation of Mme. de Girardin's *Cléopâtre*. A month before this production Scribe, whose *Adrienne Lecouvreur* was to follow *Cléopâtre*, wrote to his collaborator: "You have probably heard the wretch's latest trick—she is five months *enceinte*. The news is official, and besides, the

comet is visible to the naked eye. I am trying to arrange for her to play *Cléopâtre* before she lies up, so that when it's over everybody else will be out of the way and she will be able to give her attention to us." Of this performance a spectator wrote this well-known and much-quoted passage: "When the curtain went up on the second act it was obvious that Mlle. Rachel, at full length on her sofa and as much concerned, one might have thought, on her own account as on Cleopatra's, had her mind elsewhere. She was seen to look at and to make signs to a well-known personage seated in a stage-box, who, to do him justice, was not slow to take his part in the unexpected prologue. For this I have the evidence of my own eyes as well as those of others. Was it difficult to foresee that Mlle. Rachel would make a hash of the unfortunate Queen of Egypt, whom indeed she messed up completely?"

In deciding as to the value of this testimony we must take the value of the witness into

account. This was the journalist, Charles Maurice, inferior critic and professional gossip-monger, who alternately toadied to and slandered Rachel. His infamous *brochure, La Vérité-Rachel*, cost him one ear (in a duel) but profited him otherwise to the tune of 200,000 francs. That Rachel suffered Maurice at all was probably due to her sense of publicity. Of this same performance of *Cléopâtre* Théophile Gautier wrote: "None could deny the actress's majesty, irony, strength, and passion. Rachel's talent put forth new and unexpected facets, and the rôle allowed her to show that she possesses, in addition to royal dignity and womanly grace, a noble intimacy permissive of lyrical outbursts, a dramatic effectiveness tempered by humour, and a breadth of gesture and by-play beyond the scope normally assigned to classic tragedy." Six months after the birth of her second child Rachel is said to have been engaged to a naval-lieutenant, a certain M. Aubaret. I am inclined to dismiss

this, believing that if engagement there was, it was due to the fact that she was staying at the seaside. . . .

And now we come to Hector B——, to whom it is certain that she was at one period definitely betrothed. Hector B—— was a young gentleman who led a cultivated, bookish existence with his parents in the far confines of some remote province. Hector was not to be put off either by Rachel's notoriety or her two children; he insisted that she should become his wife, and strange to say his parents insisted also. The engagement lasted some twelve months, and we find her writing: "Believe in your Rachel who loves you, and is determined to become your wife." Now why should Rachel want to marry this bookish virtuous young man? Had she the hankering after respectability, that old Dumasian ideal which pursues every Dumasian *cocotte,* the ideal of "*pureté, campagne, etc., etc.*"? Rachel's views on the subject of an artist's marriage were

summed up long before: "If I marry, good-bye to the actress, and in her place only one married woman the more!" One gathers that Rachel must have been genuinely in love with the young man, for the simple reason that her letters to him are entirely devoid of wit, and that when after some twelve months of nonsense she recovered her senses, her letters recover their style.

Is it not obvious that Rachel had many moods, and that for each of them she must find the appropriate master? Her Jewish intelligence found its complement in Véron; ambition sent her rummaging among imperial débris—Walewski, the Prince de Joinville, the Prince Napoléon. Legouvé's "*fond de titi gouailleur*" explains Arthur Bertrand; the desire for a belated respectability throws her into the arms of Hector B——. And still there remains the woman who could make the conquest signalled in *Lettres à l'Aimé*. The Beloved to whom these letters were written still

lives, or was alive in 1925. In 1854 "*le cher Henri*" had a head of Hyperion's curls, and Rachel sends him her photograph, "a poor remembrancer of a very plain face, much too flattering and altogether too young." She realizes, clever woman! the difference in age and would discount it in advance. There is question even of marriage, to which, however, Rachel puts an end:

My dear Henry,

It was very wrong of you not to come and see me last night. I must think *seriously* about my health, and my life which belongs to my children. In fact, I can't think seriously about anything else. Take this in good part and don't bear me a grudge. The bodily pain I have suffered has worn me out, and the little strength I have left must go to looking after myself. Come and see me soon.

Your friend,

RACHEL.

Something we might call loyalty survived in her for Monsieur and Mme. Crémieux. Relations, we remember, had been broken off in 1841, and the rupture lasted thirteen years. At one time Rachel had attempted to make it up, Crémieux having been appointed Minister of Justice. But Mme. Crémieux was more Roman than her spouse, and met Rachel's attempts at reconciliation with a letter upon the austerity of which not even Lord Chesterfield in collaboration with Madame de Sévigné could have improved:

Frankly, Rachel, we have known each other too long to try to hoodwink one another. Not to beat about the bush, let me tell you that I don't believe in your repentance, and for the simple reason that I don't believe it is possible for you to change your mode of living. As for our house, you know it inside out, and must realize that you will not find it very amusing. I hope that you will understand my inability

to feel towards you as I felt towards the young girl we welcomed to our hearth so many years ago.

But if my affection has faded there still remains the liveliest admiration for the great artist whom I applauded only last night, and who inspires me with enthusiasm for her admirable talents. If this great artist should deign to visit me, I shall be proud to receive her.

And if ever it should come about that Rachel should prove herself capable of carrying out in her actual conduct the ideals which she has so often professed—in this event my affection will again be hers, and will be offered to her even before she asks for it. God grants His pardon to the penitent; it is not for me, a sinful human being, to pretend to greater severity.

AMÉLIE CRÉMIEUX.

To which Rachel riposted:

Madame,

If for one moment I had thought how gravely calumny had injured me in your regard, I should not have humbled myself to put upon paper the emanations of my heart.

Your answer chills and stupefies me. Yet I do not reproach myself for having believed, even mistakenly, in the continued existence of gentle hearts and noble minds.

That God wil[1] protect you and yours, Madame, is devoutly wished by

RACHEL.

Once more—and perhaps we need not make too much of the fact that the lawyer's help was necessary in the matter of the suit with Legouvé—an attempt at reconciliation was made. This time it was successful. "Hiding her emaciation in a long robe of black velvet fastening up to the neck with gold, olive-shaped buttons," the ailing artist climbed three flights of stairs to the apartment on the threshold of

which her old friends awaited her. There she threw herself fainting into the arms of Mme. Crémieux and, recovering, whispered how she had searched, but alas! in vain, for a gown of 1838 in which she might still be the little Rachel of long ago! We must not, I think, deny our subject the eye for a situation.

10

For her last lover Rachel returned to her favourite dynasty. (The Napoleons and the empresses of the French stage appear always to have been mutually attracted.) The great Emperor's conquest of Mlle. George may have been a more or less perfunctory affair; but for his nephew, the Prince Jérôme, Rachel had something approaching affection, and he for her. This last liaison, which began in 1853, continued until Rachel's death, and it was on Jérôme's yacht that the dying woman made her last journey from Marseilles to le Cannet. The definite breakdown in health dates from the expedition to America.

Often had brother Raphaël, with an eye to managerial profit, urged Rachel to make the trip, and indeed everything pointed to its desir-

ability. The Russian tour had been immensely profitable, and before Raphaël's eyes dangled the example of Jenny Lind, who had returned from the States with a million francs. In addition there was an admirable reason why Rachel should be absent from Paris for a time; this reason being the extraordinary success of the Italian actress, Adelaide Ristori. The year was 1855, and the enormous crowds drawn by the Great Exhibition were expending their theatrical enthusiasm upon the rising and not upon the waning star. Ristori made her first appearance at the Italiens, and to judge by contemporary accounts her success was greater than any Rachel had ever known. The Frenchwoman was moved to a fight which was of short duration. Dumas, who never forgot that Rachel had rebuffed him, set the ball rolling. "Come Rachel, and see my *Myrrha*," he wrote in *Le Mousquetaire* of May 31st, 1855, "come and study Ristori, and add, if you can, to your well-known qualities one-fourth of the talent

of this great artist." Rachel lay low. Then Dumas issued a challenge: "Let the Opera House be taken, and let prices be doubled, for a performance at which Rachel shall play *Phèdre* and Ristori *Myrrha*. The order of performance to be decided by lot. We guarantee Madame Ristori's acceptance." Rachel was not to be drawn. Cautiously she went to see this *Myrrha,* and throughout sat bolt upright in her box, giving no sign of approval, and leaving before the end. Only once did she turn her head, and then it was to send a message to Arsène Houssaye ordering him to announce her immediate reappearance at the Français. When this took place Ristori was present in a box, and with a finer tact indulged in lavish demonstrations of enthusiasm. On the next night the French actress went again to *Myrrha* and was graciously pleased to signify a modicum of approval. And now she launched her whirlwind series of performances intended to crush the newcomer. But in vain Rachel

trotted out *Camille*, *Hermione*, and the others, in vain she saddled every horse in the old stable; the French press could talk of nothing but the pre-eminence of the Italian.

So off to America Rachel went. As she had run away from George, so now she ran away from Ristori. The venture brought disappointment and ill-health. The takings at Jenny Lind's first performance were 96,000 francs; those of Rachel's première amounted to 26,000. There was, of course, no reason to believe that the success which the singer had attained could be repeated by the actress. The trills and roulades of *bel canto*, besides being a mindless delight, are independent of the language in which they may be executed; but before you can get any fun out of Racine you must at least know French, and French was not an American accomplishment in 1855. A later actress, profiting by Rachel's mishap, always took care to send over "*des boatloads*

d'institutrices pour les misses americaines" twelve months before her campaigns.

After some depressing months Rachel writes from Havana:

I am ill, worse than ill. My frame has fallen away to nothing, and so has my mind. Although I am here at Havana I shall not be able to play; the director, as he is entitled to do under his contract, has made me forfeit 7,000 piastres! I have paid him and all my artists as well. Thus it comes about that I must bring my poor routed army back to the Seine. It is in my mind that I am coming home to die and, like Napoleon, shall come to the Invalides to demand a stone whereon to lay my head. I hope it may not be so. In Paris I shall find the two guardian-angels who are my boys; even now I hear them calling. Too long and too wilfully have I been away from the embraces of their tender little arms! It is

God who, cherishing his angels, sends me home to them. I have carried my name to the ends of the earth, but it is my heart which I bring back to my loved ones.

Returned to France, we get in a letter to a paragraphist, probably Maurice, a glimpse of the old impenitent Rachel:

I have heard many intelligent people say that it is better to be abused by the Press than ignored. I am writing to thank you for your last puff. But why, my dear friend, can you not find something more amusing to write than these silly stories about my marriage, which exists purely in your own brain and which you invent for the sole purpose of feeding your malice? How can you suppose that I should do anything so utterly absurd as to marry? I have two adorable children, my birth-certificate announces that I am thirty-two, my face tells me I am fifty, and we won't say anything about

the rest. Eighteen years of classical tirades, scamperings from one end of the world to the other, retreats from Moscow and betrayals at Waterloo, treacherous seas and ungrateful earth—it is all these which have aged me! But God protects the brave, and I thought He had reserved for me a little corner of France, not to be found in geographies, where I might forget my sorrows and that old age which has come upon me too soon. And now among the charming little birds offering me sweet welcome comes your miserable *canard*!

If only I had had the sense to die in America you would, I am sure, have dedicated to me a brilliant and generous column. And since, thanks to a miracle, I have risen from the dead ready to take your hand once more and look into your face as into that of an old friend, you say: "She lives, and thank God for it! Now to make her sit up!" And off you go to make fun of your poor Rachel, whose nerves really can't stand it! As if wit like yours couldn't

find enough victims elsewhere! Is it kind to behave like this towards a poor creature returning from the other world? Confess that you are never satisfied unless you are tormenting me, and I on my side will forgive you once more and even invite you to come and see me.

By Jupiter, but I take this to be a magnanimous letter, written not by the great tragédienne but by the good sort who signs herself

RACHEL.

Room must be found here for the well-known letter to an unknown correspondent:

Houssaye tells me that it was he who gave you the little Louis-Quinze watch of which you have so kindly replaced the glass, through which one inspected the entrails of the beast, with an enamel perpetuating the features of your humble servant. I find, and Sarah finds also, that the lower part of the face is a little long. *Mais les émails, ou plutôt les émaux—*

car il y a des maux partout,—ne se corrigent plus, une fois sous le feu. I still think that the watch is something only to be worn after my death, and indeed I am so rundown that this may not be deferred very long. If Mme. de Girardin will write a drama round some consumptive of the past—I hope she can find one for I like my personages to be historical—I will undertake to act the part well. I shall draw tears because I shall be weeping over my own tragedy. It's no good telling me that this is only nerves; I am positive there is something serious the matter. We were talking just now of your little watch; with me it's the same as when one overwinds and something snaps! I often feel something snap when I am winding myself up to play. Only the day before yesterday in *Horace*, just as I was polishing off Maubant, I felt something snap. Yes, my dear friend, Rachel's spring is broken. Say nothing of this on account of my mother and the children.

Last this, written to an old lover:

My friend, I am very ill. I am leaving Paris, not yet for the next world but for a better climate where I hope to find the warmth which is denied me here. I am ill in mind as well as body, and all of me must be renewed, provided it is not too late! Sometimes it seems as though it suddenly becomes night in me, that all is dark in my brain. Everything around me disappears and annihilation threatens your Rachel. Alas, poor me! the *me* of which I was so proud, too proud perhaps, and so much reduced today that hardly anything remains. This letter, my friend, is to say good-bye; it is Rachel's farewell which you are too far away to seek and Rachel is too weak to bring.

How many sad things have happened, dear friend, since last we met, and how terrible that voyage![1] I cannot write without tears of that terrible disappointment which was the cause of

[1] To America.

my illness. How could I expect so sad an end to an enterprise which began so well, and which fell to pieces at the very hour when success appeared to dawn? And how easily could I have foreseen and forestalled the evil which now grips me relentlessly, that shirt of Nessus which I may never put off! Alas, I had too much confidence in my physical strength, too much confidence in my star, and without any kind of precaution, or nursing of my strength in any way, I went straight ahead on that interminable road which stretches from New York to Havana—the last halting-place in my fatal Odyssey! Indeed, my dear friend, I do not know whether I shall live to return home, whether God will have pity on me for the sake of my poor dear children and my friends, or whether He will take me to Himself.

Farewell, my friend. This letter is perhaps my last. You who knew Rachel in the brilliance of her splendour and the riot of her glory, who have so often heard the theatre ring with her

triumphs—you would not believe that the gaunt spectre which now drags itself wearily over the earth is RACHEL.

She died at Cannet on the 3rd of January, 1858. A few days before her death she wrote for a visitor importuning her autograph:

Dans huit jours d'ici, je commercerai a être
Mangée par les vers et par les biographes.

I shall take leave of her gazing at the purple and blue of the Mediterranean and moving her thin hands among the blue and purple of her jewel-cases. Of what did she think? Of the little girl walking the road at the tail of the pedlar's wagon? Of that art which was to die with her? Of the applause of continents? Of imperishable fame? Of her favourite sister, Rebecca? Of the long procession of lovers, to each of whom she had given not only the inessential body of Rachel but something of

Rachel's soul? Of her will to live? Of the flame which had burnt up the lamp?

She was thirty-six. Of all the epitaphs made for Rachel I take the best to be that of Janin, composed for her while she was still living:

Seule encore à cette heure elle représente, et d'une façon souveraine, un art anéanti, perdu, oublié, une poussière. . . . Elle a ranimé d'un souffle tout-puissant cette poussière, et depuis bientôt vingt années, elle a marché dans ce grand art de la tragédie à travers mille ruines et mille obstacles. Enfant bien inspirée! jeune fille aux émotions soudaines! artiste remplie des caprices du malaise et de toutes les passions de l'artiste! et tantôt belle, tantôt médiocre, aujourd'hui elle marche sur la nue, à la façon des filles d'Homère, et le lendemain la voilà dans l'abîme! Cette femme est un problème, une énigme, un excès en toute chose; il n'y a pas de blâme et pas de louange aussi qu'elle n'ait mérités et qu'elle ne mérite; excessive en tout,

en mal comme en bien, en inspiration, en terre-à-terre, *esclave et reine, ambitieuse et résignée, éloquente, éclatante, inspirée, ou bien languissante, inanimée, accablée!—Une statue! . . . un spectre . . . une force! . . . une ombre! . . .*

Matthew Arnold was too nineteenth-century an Englishman to write so realistically. For him:

In her, like us, there clashed contending powers—
Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome!
The strife, the mixture in her soul, are ours;
Her genius and her glory are her own.

He would not allow Rachel to be a good unadulterated Jewess. And a Jewess she was to her bone and marrow, a Jewess in the worst

and in the best sense. She could appreciate Queen Victoria's bracelet by its weight and fib about its inscription; she could beguile her sick-bed by covering it with gold pieces. But if her avarice and her ostentation were Jewish, her intellect, her wealth of temperament—without which it were better an actress had never been born—her magnificent persistence, in a word, her genius, were Jewish also. At the grave-side the Grand Rabbi concluded his funeral oration, spoken in Hebrew, with a formal protest against the many stories of her conversion —a conversion never very strenuously denied by the actress anxious to conciliate and gather to herself every possible kind of audience. Yet we must be fair. At a *soirée* where she was engaged to give the great scene in *Polyeucte* she refused, since she would not offend the Archbishop of Paris with an insincere delivery of the famous "*Je vois, je sais, je crois, je suis désabusée.*" Using the French language so that

all might understand, the Grand Rabbi said: *"Rachel avait trop d'honneur et de cœur pour ne pas mourir dans la religion de ses pères."* The mourners included Déjazet, Mme. Doche (the original Marguerite Gautier), Jane Essler, Scribe, the two Dumas, Sandeau, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny, Mérimée, Augier, Halévy, Théophile Gautier, Murger, and Michel and Calmann Lévy, Balzac's publishers. Alone the Comédie was not represented and for a very simple reason—the *père* Félix. The Comédie had announced its intention of inviting Samson to represent it at the graveside. But the *père* Félix remembered the staircase down which, following demands more preposterous than usual, the professor had kicked him twenty years before. He wrote to the Comédie taking formal objection to Samson's presence, "prompted to this attitude by sentiments of the highest propriety." And so the history of Rachel begins and ends with papa Félix.

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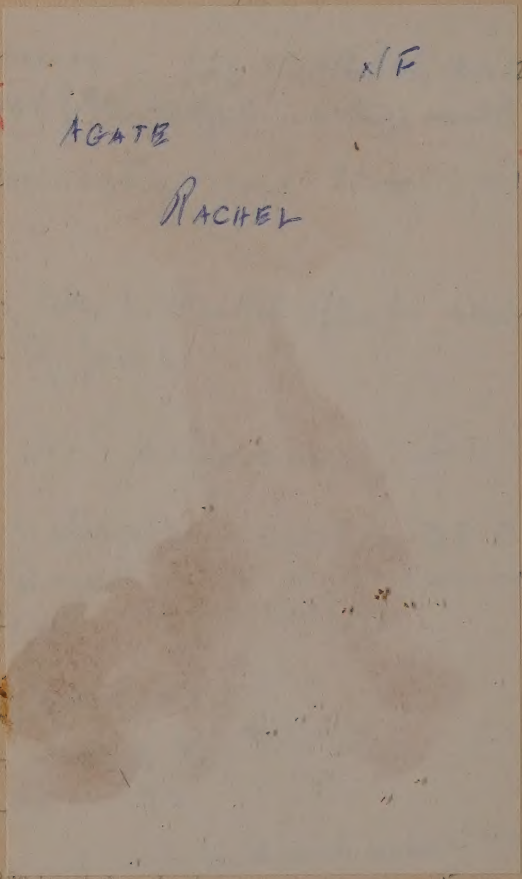
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